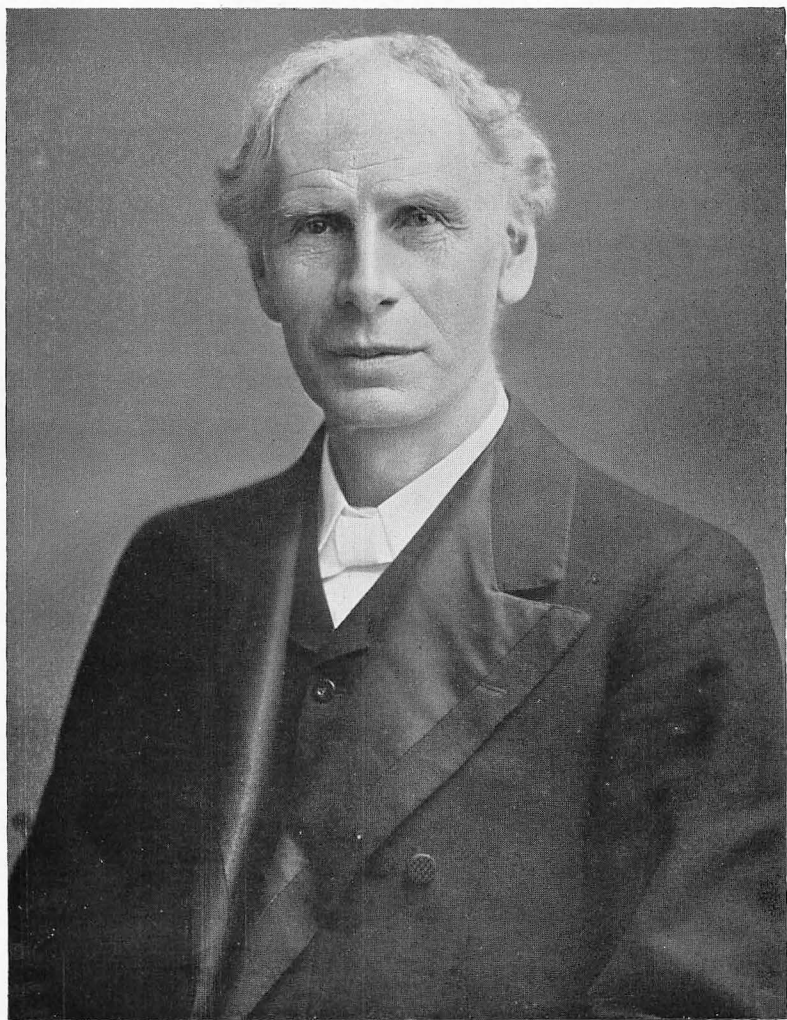

ARNOLD THOMAS OF BRISTOL





Photo]

REV. H. ARNOLD THOMAS, LL.D.

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ARNOLD THOMAS
OF BRISTOL

COLLECTED PAPERS AND
ADDRESSES

WITH A MEMOIR BY
NATHANIEL MICKLEM, M.A.

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

IN the preparation of this Memoir I have received the greatest help from friends both in Bristol and elsewhere. In particular I should like to express my grateful thanks to Mrs. Thomas, Professor Elkanah Armitage, Professor George Hare Leonard, Mr. Edgar Tanner, and Mr. Ronald Gunn.

N. M.

SELY OAK COLLEGES,
March 1925.

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MEMOIR

A sweet, attractive kind of grace,
A full assurance given by lookes,
Continuall comfort in a face,
The lineaments of Gospel bookes.

I.—EARLIER YEARS AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

ARNOLD THOMAS, to call him by the name by which he was known and loved in all the Churches, shunned the limelight as much as many men seek it ; he took no pleasure in speaking of himself, and he would not wish more said in this place than might be for the comfort and advantage of others. He was born on June 13, 1848. His mother was a daughter of Robert Maynard Leonard of Bristol and granddaughter of John Hare, who built Zion Chapel, Bedminster, where for some years Arnold Thomas's father, David Thomas, was the minister. David Thomas afterwards became the first minister of Highbury Chapel ; some account of his life and ministry is to be found in *Memorials of David Thomas : edited by his Son.*¹ David Thomas was related by marriage to Joseph Cottle, who published for Southey and also for Charles Lamb, and who in 1798 produced *Lyrical Ballads* for Wordsworth and Coleridge, a landmark in English literature ; it began with *The Ancient Mariner* and ended with *Tintern Abbey*. For two years David Thomas lodged with Cottle. He was also the friend of John Foster, author of the once famous *Essays*. " I cannot read the Fathers," David

¹ Hodder & Stoughton, 1876.

Thomas once said, "they are too prolix for me. I prefer Father Foster." His brother Samuel was the father of D. A. Thomas, who afterwards became Lord Rhondda, and it is interesting to know of the affection which existed between Arnold Thomas and his cousin, whose life ran along such different lines from his own. "David had sent me a most affectionate message from his deathbed," he writes,¹ "and his wife telephoned to me, when the end came, to come as soon as possible, and we had a very affecting service in the chamber where his poor wasted body was lying. . . . They told me that David cared a good deal about religion, and had said it would mean much more to him if he ever got better. The doctor said, 'But you don't mean psalm-singing and that kind of thing,' and the reply was, 'Yes, I do mean that.' . . . I have been sorry not to see David more these recent years. We got on so well together. And he had so much to say."

Of Arnold Thomas's earliest days there is not very much to be recorded; it was a very happy home in which he was brought up, though the shadow of death came early upon it; he was always the most mindful and affectionate of brothers. No doubt in his case also the child was father to the man; for it is reported that at a very early age the family would play at going to church, and Arnold would be the minister and preacher. Unhappily no record of his sermons on those occasions has been preserved, but they were very brief, and were, in substance, an exhortation to be good; possibly,

therefore, they represent the core or first draft of the sermon entitled "Be Good" which he later preached before the Congregational Union, and which is here reprinted.¹ The first prize that he won (and how he hated it!) at a dame school was entitled, *How to Make the Best of Things : a Book for Girls*. It would be difficult to think of a more inappropriate gift ; for there was always a great deal of the natural *man* about Arnold Thomas as the true basis for that which was spiritual.

Religion was clearly not a burden and a weariness to the children in that home. Of Sunday he wrote many years later : " What memories it stirs within us—of Sundays long ago, the Sundays of our childhood ; of happy hours in the garden when the lilies were in bloom ; or before the glowing fire in the company of the much-enduring but immortal Pilgrim ; of the faces and familiar forms of many who have long since been keeping the Sabbath of Eternity."

Arnold Thomas was immensely proud of his father, and was at one time prepared to boast of him beyond the limits of strict truth ; when some companion of his at old Miss Overbury's dame school was bragging about his own father, Arnold Thomas capped his tale with, " That's nothing ! My father has lots of race-horses ; you should see them !" For this he was called to task by the mistress who overheard him : " You know, Master Thomas, your father has a large number of very valuable books, but he has no horses !" This story would doubtless have appeared in a volume

¹ See *infra*, pp. 83 ff.

entitled *Confessions of a Congregational Minister*, which Arnold Thomas sometimes spoke of writing.

From his earliest days he had a great love of flowers. One of his first recollections was of a visit to the pleasant house which his great-grandfather, Mr. Hare, had built at Knowle, a little way out of the city. Thither he was sometimes taken as a boy to see Mrs. Hare, the sister of Joseph Cottle. Here his imagination was captured by the rows and rows of little, tidy pots in the old-fashioned garden, each with its little red geraniums, and the "bass" matting that seemed to be lying about everywhere, the hot sun bringing out its homely, wholesome, comfortable smell, which blended with the more definite scent of the geraniums. It was not the details he remembered but the general sense of warmth, light, colour, and the strong, satisfying scent. He always had an undetailed enjoyment of heat and sun and colour "in the lump." Years later on holiday in Switzerland, when the rest of the party were picking the flowers one by one, selecting them and making tidy posies of them, Arnold Thomas stooped down, and with his great hands swept up a whole bunch of flowers just as they grew, and carried them off as type and representative of fields of glory, caring nothing if stray ends and roots were carried too. That was just like him—sudden, impulsive, ample, impatient of anything small or finical. But he was an artist to the finger tips. Quite untaught he had a most uncommon gift of composition and painting, and his sketches prove his rare talent in that direction. Nature he always loved. "We have had a pleasant

journey," he wrote in 1920, "the country looking quite like Heaven, only nicer if we are to take the Revelations literally." Above all he loved Bristol and the Downs; his favourite walk was to the Sea Walls, where he would look down the gorge to the sea and the Welsh hills beyond. He loved Clevedon and the church nestling in the hills where Arthur Hallam lies *usque ad tubam*. He loved to watch the sea :

Still have I stood beside thee, and out-thrown
My spirit onward on thine element—
Beyond thine element—to tremble low
Before those feet which trod thee as they trod
Earth—to the holy, happy, peopled place,
Where there is no more sea. Yea, and my soul,
Having put on thy vast similitude,
Hath wildly moanèd at her proper depth,
Echoed her proper musings, veil'd in shade
Her secrets of decay, and exercised
An elemental strength, in casting up
Rare gems and things of death on fancy's shore,
Till Nature said, "Enough."

He went to school at Mill Hill, and afterwards had some private coaching with Dr. Hurndall. At one time Francis Newman, the Cardinal's brother, offered to read Latin with him, and he tells how Mrs. Newman, who was one of the "Brethren," presented himself and his father with a tract entitled *Happy John, or the Dying Policeman*. He once heard Francis Newman lecture on "Theism" in Bristol: "As he was developing his argument some gentleman in the audience, having heard of the lecturer's writings, and not able to grasp his

present purpose, stood up and cried, 'Christ came to put that right,' and marched out. Newman followed his retreating footsteps with hurried explanations of his meaning and aim. But it was no good. The man held on his way, and the lecture was resumed."¹

In 1865 Arnold Thomas matriculated at London, and two years were spent at University College. He took his M.A. in Mental and Moral Philosophy in 1870. There were many distinguished professors at University College at this time : de Morgan was teaching mathematics ; Henry Malden, Greek ; and the witty David Masson, English ; but of far greater influence than all these in the life of Arnold Thomas was Sir John R. Seeley, who was then the unacknowledged author of *Ecce Homo*. "I was frequently in Seeley's house in Camden Town when I was a boy, and during my first long vacation at Cambridge I spent a month under the same roof with him at Barmouth, being a member of a reading party which he was conducting, so that with a great admiration for his intellect and his learning, and not less for the moral elevation of his character, it was natural that my attitude towards the Christian religion should come somewhat to resemble his own."²

While at University College he took a sitting at the Chapel in North London where Thomas Jones was the minister : "I sat where I could look into the face of Robert Browning, who was a very regular attendant." Browning influenced his thought

¹ *Congregational Quarterly*, January 1923, p. 58.

² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

greatly. "There was a new leaven at work in those days, and sermons like those of Robertson of Brighton touched me, and I think many others of my age, and awakened a readier response than the Evangelicalism of Mr. Spurgeon. We read Dr. Young's *Christ of History* with much sympathy, and later Seeley's *Ecce Homo* came home to us with extraordinary force. . . . Then there were Tennyson and Browning, with all the implications of their poetry commending to our youthful minds a theology which was not exactly the theology of the schools, but which seemed to us to be profoundly true and credible, and won our willing assent." ¹ A poem of Tennyson which much appealed to him, and which in many ways admirably represents his own position, is "The Ancient Sage" :—

If thou would'st hear the Nameless, and wilt dive
Into the Temple-cave of thine own self,
There, brooding by the central altar, thou
May'st haply learn the Nameless hath a voice,
By which thou wilt abide, if thou be wise,
As if thou knewest, tho' thou canst not know ;
For Knowledge is the swallow on the lake
That sees and stirs the surface-shadow there
But never yet hath dipt into the abysm,
The Abysm of all Abysms, beneath, within
The blue of sky and sea, the green of earth,
And in the million-millionth of a grain
Which cleft and cleft again for evermore,
And ever vanishing, never vanishes,
To me, my son, more mystic than myself,
Or even than the Nameless is to me . . .
Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O my son,

¹ *Congregational Quarterly*, January 1923.

Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in . . .
For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven : wherefore thou be wise,
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith !
She reels not in the storm of warring words . . .
She feels the Sun is hid but for a night,
She spies the summer thro' the winter bud . . .
She finds the fountain where they wail'd ' Mirage ' ! . . .
Let be thy wail and help thy fellow men,
And make thy gold thy vassal not thy king,
And fling free alms into the beggar's bowl,
And send the day into the darken'd heart ; . . .
Nor thou be rageful, like a handled bee,
And lose thy life by usage of thy sting ;
Nor harm an adder thro' the lust for harm,
Nor make a snail's horn shrink for wantonness . . .
And lay thine uphill shoulder to the wheel,
And climb the Mount of Blessing, whence, if thou
Look higher, then—perchance—thou mayest—beyond
A hundred ever-rising mountain lines,
And past the range of Night and Shadow—see
The high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day
Strike on the Mount of Vision !

Arnold Thomas walked with a firmer faith and fuller vision than Lord Tennyson, yet this poem, even down to its inculcation of kindness to animals, is remarkably true to his outlook upon the ultimate mysteries.

In 1867 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge ; he took his B.A. with a First Class in the Moral Science Tripos in 1871, and his M.A. in 1874. Among the Fellows of Trinity at this time were W. K. Clifford, F. W. H. Myers and James Stuart. Kingsley and Maurice were also teaching at the

University : “ I loved Maurice clear or obscure. I was charmed by the sweet severity of his face and the moving tones of his voice. I was every week in his house, where he had a kind of private class and discoursed to us freely about Locke and other celebrities less interesting to me than himself. . . . It was worth going to Cambridge if only to come near this saintly apostle and prophet.”¹ His tutor in chief, however, was Professor Henry Sidgwick, whom he held in great regard. “ It was very pleasant to me to read your letter,” wrote Sidgwick to him on December 24, 1870, “ and I am very glad that you can look back with so much satisfaction on the studies that we have pursued together. I cannot, however, feel that you owe your First Class to my teaching : in fact, if you had got a second, I should have attributed it to the defects of that teaching.”

An old College friend refers in a letter to “ the days when we took down Sidgwick’s criticisms in company while Balfour drew caricatures. . . . I too decorate my mantelpiece with the pot we won in November 1868 :

They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—
We were a ghastly crew,

moving the mild S—— for the only occasion on record to profanity.” At Cambridge began Arnold Thomas’s lifelong friendship with Elkanah Armitage, now Professor Emeritus of the Bradford United Independent College ; at Cambridge he preached his first sermon, under the instigation, I believe, of Arnold Foster, later of Hankow. “ I was asked to

¹ *Congregational Quarterly*, January 1923.

take a service one Sunday evening at a mission hall connected with the Congregational Church, then in Downing Street, and I felt it my duty to accept the invitation. Being a very shy youth, and especially in regard to all religious matters, the anticipation of making my first public appearance was not without its horrors. I remember lying on the bank of the river in the Trinity walks on the May afternoon of the day fixed for the service, with an agony of apprehension in my mind, and am not sure that I did not feel tempted to slip into the sluggish stream and disappear finally from view. However, I braced myself as best I could for the tremendous task, and duly turned up at the appointed hour. If I remember rightly, I had prepared a sermon which I supposed would be more or less appropriate for the congregation I expected to find awaiting me, but I have no recollection whatever of the text or the subject. I only know that that excellent sermon was never preached at that time or anywhere else ; for I found, on arriving at the spot, that the congregation consisted of a few small children, who would most certainly not be able to make anything of my thoughtful little essay. I contented myself, therefore, with giving those youngsters a talk. What it was all about I am sure I cannot tell. From the sermon-class point of view it was probably the worst discourse that was ever delivered. I cannot recall a syllable of it, but, good, bad or indifferent, that was my first sermon."

After his time at Cambridge he spent a year at Bristol assisting his father at Highbury. Then for a session he attended lectures on theology at New

College, London. He spoke appreciatively of these opportunities, but it is doubtful whether he derived much permanent advantage from most of the lectures which he heard. We may see the line of his own thought from a letter written about this time with reference to Matthew Arnold's first book : " I can quite sympathize with you in your feeling of uneasiness after reading Matthew Arnold's book. I have been really afraid to go straight through with it, but I have read parts. The spirit of the book I do not like. It seems to me flippant where there should be great seriousness, and cynical where there should be great charity and tenderness with regard to all ' difficulties.' I feel more and more helpless and more and more persuaded that unless we enter the Kingdom of God as a little child, we cannot enter it at all. I seem to be so bewildered and lost on the great sea of human opinion, and can only trust to what seems to be the safest guide that the world has discovered yet—the teaching of Christ. I take my idea of God as much as possible from Him, His words and His character, and believe in the ' father in heaven ' rather than in M. Arnold's ' tendency that makes for righteousness.' . . . One cannot help feeling that, whoever Christ was, he knew more about the unseen world than any other teacher we have had, and—feeling that—I suppose one is wise in accepting what he says, especially when it meets a spiritual instinct." These opinions written in early manhood are typical of his attitude throughout his life, very sceptical of systems and of explanations, but in no doubt that there *is* an " unseen world " all round about us, and that

Christ is the safest guide through all these mysteries. Sceptical about all explanations, his heart responded to the Pauline mysticism which he verified experimentally, apprehending if not altogether comprehending ; Christ was for him no " dead fact stranded on the shores of the oblivious years," but a present help, a well-loved Friend, a gracious Saviour. The Scriptures most according with his thought are the first ten verses of the first epistle of John to which his mind often recurred as expressing the Christian message and experience in its simplest form.

It was perhaps the influence of F. W. H. Myers and Sidgwick, but rather, it is likely, his innate scepticism, that turned his thoughts with a kind of wistful curiosity to spiritualism. He was of far too robust a mind to be carried away by that sometimes heady wine, and far too critical to be easily imposed upon ; his interest was very much from without and not as a dabbler in spiritualism, but he seems to have had a hope, or at least a keen desire, that some proof or assurance might be found along these lines.

He was both a lover and to some extent a writer of hymns. He considered " Come, O Thou Traveller Unknown " a fine religious poem, though he thought it unsuitable for public worship. The beautiful hymn, " God from on high hath heard," it is believed, is in the new Congregational Hymnary because he said he would not have the book if it were omitted. He defended Wesley's " Jesu, Lover of my soul " against modern criticisms, and when he was dying he would have it read to him. He loved the rendering of the ancient text, " The hand of the Lord was upon me *to steady me.*" His faith

was well summed up in the words of his own translation from Colossians : “ I say that in Christ, in the human Christ, all the divine fulness dwells, and you, being in Him, are made full also.”

More helpful than the systematic courses at New College would seem to have been occasional lectures by Thomas Binney of the King's Weigh House : “ For my father's sake he took the kindest possible interest in me, and did his best when my student days were ended to get me settled in some congenial church. I believe he was a little disappointed sometimes to find that Churches refused to take me at his own valuation.”

Arnold Thomas's first charge was of a small Congregational church at Burnt Ash Lane, Lee, but, largely through the influence of Mr. Augustine Birrell, he was soon called to the church at Ealing. It was at Ealing in 1874 that he married Miss Emily Newall, who all the rest of his days was “ the light of his eyes ” and the dear companion in all his joys and sorrows. Those who knew Arnold Thomas most intimately knew best how ideally happy he was in his home life. Mrs. Arnold Thomas, who comes of Covenanting stock, has a shrewdness and wit like his own ; as one of his closest friends said, “ She was just the wife for him ” ; she guarded him and took care of him, shared his spirit, and, herself little able through poor health to appear much in public, served many by her devotion to him and care of him.

Arnold Thomas himself never enjoyed robust health, though he was seldom ill. He was tall and spare and broad-shouldered, and up to the last

few months of his life active if not athletic. He learnt to ride when he went on holiday as a boy in South Wales, and in later years he enjoyed a gallop over the Downs ; he was a great lover of animals ; he thought it far better that men should spend their holidays playing golf than hunting stags ; after careful study of the subject he became a convinced " anti-vivisectionist." It was a sad blow to him when in 1920 his little dog " Tim " had to be put away : " I have been feeling very horrid about Tim," he writes. " . . . It was dreadful to have to extinguish such an active and affectionate spirit, and the house seems strangely silent and empty without him. Perhaps I was too fond of him, but there is something frightfully appealing about these dumb creatures, so dependent and so human in their ways." With regard to the same tragic event he further observed, with a characteristic twinkle in his eye : " I could better have spared *all* my deacons ! " Lost or sick animals were sure of his sympathy and, if possible, of his help. It is on record that a neighbour, Mrs. Gunn, was surprised one day by a visit from the vicar bearing a cat in a terrible condition of disrepair. The vicar explained that Arnold Thomas had found the cat on the Down and, being unable to take it in himself because of his canary, had instructed the vicar to bring it round to her to look after. He himself quickly followed with anxious inquiries, and was greatly relieved to find that the cat had shown real gratitude for supper and a bed. He always had a canary ; one of these birds would hop about the room and perch on his pen as he held it in his hand. He enjoyed a visit

to the Clifton Zoo : " I always think we have a great deal to learn from *them*," was his remark after a prolonged observation of the monkey-house.

He loved many forms of exercise. At Cambridge he rowed in the II Trinity first boat ; he was a skilful and enthusiastic skater in earlier days : " I had some splendid times on the fens at Swavesey in my day," he wrote. At Broad Plain ¹ he enjoyed a game of skittles. " I am proposing to learn golf in my old age," he wrote in 1918, " and I expect to spend many hours on the pleasant links out Kingsweston way." Later, however, he is reported as having said that golf is " a silly game " ; certainly he attained to no proficiency in it ! In particular he loved sailing, which, he said, was " just like flying." He was, says one, " a wild creature to go out with ; he had no idea of danger. . . . In physical things he had no fear. It was a dreadful thing to drive behind him when he was driving a horse ! " He liked to rise early on a fine summer Monday morning and cycle down to Clevedon to breakfast. He believed it was part of a minister's duty to take due care of his body. In an address to the students of Brecon College in June 1888 he said : " Dr. Liddon quotes in one of his sermons from a letter written by Tholuck to Dr. Pusey in which the writer complains that ' the German divines, having got rid of the fundamental Christian doctrines by means of the Higher Criticism, were insisting with great earnestness on the necessity for taking regular exercise.' . . . But, though we may talk too much and think too much about regular exercise, and those

¹ See *infra*, pp. 51 ff.

other means by which the body may be kept sound and healthy, we may think too little of such matters. . . . And if, through want of fresh air, or wholesome food, or sleep or exercise, you become melancholy and depressed, as you are likely enough to do, if you become jaded and fretful, if the blood creeps, and the nerves prick and tingle, and all the wheels of Being are slow, how can you expect to be of much use and help to your neighbours when their souls are cast down and disquieted within them? You may speak the language of hope and trust. You may offer the commonplaces of comfort, but they will feel, when the business is over, that they have had but a dull and dreary time."

"He was always to me," writes Professor Armitage,¹ "a long, charming creature, whose limbs learnt grace from the qualities of his mind, and whose movements and bodily actions satisfied the eye as one saw him in the boat or on the path, in the saddle or astride his gleaming bicycle." Of Arnold Thomas it may assuredly be said that the beauty of the Lord his God rested upon him. Little wonder! for we may apply to him the words used of Gladstone by Spurgeon: "He lived ever in the King's palace, and saw much of His Face." "Once when he was preaching at Lyndhurst Road," writes Dr. Horton, "as he walked down the hill, a stranger passing him was so struck by his appearance that he turned and followed him and came to the service in the church. The episode seemed to me very typical of him. It was his mien, his bearing, the serious and even sad aspect, so often lighted up by the twinkle

¹ *Congregational Quarterly*, October 1924.

of humour, and always made tender by sympathy and humility, that constituted his perpetual influence on his time. His sermons and addresses, and his too sparse writings, were always to me full of instruction and help. But it was he himself that affected me as no other minister ever did. My last time with him was during the Free Church Council meetings in March 1923. He was overflowing with life and humour."

He was of remarkably striking appearance with his tall figure and his noble mien. When he entered the dining-room at an hotel, the waiters and the guests would turn to look at him. He was very observant, and this cannot have escaped his notice, but it never made him in the least self-conscious, and there was no trace of vanity in him. His successor, Mr. Ballard, referred in a happy phrase to "the ministry of his presence." When he entered a committee meeting, apart from any words that he uttered or action that he took, his presence would affect the whole tone and atmosphere of the proceedings; nothing small or petty or sectarian was possible in the presence of one so genial, so gracious and so human, while there was always about him what Jeremy Taylor called "the awfulness of a reverend man." He taught us what it means to be heavenly-minded. The beauty of his face was the reflection of a soul of which it might well be said that—

A thousand liveried angels lacky her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream, and solemn vision,
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear.

He was always a great reader, but it is interesting and significant that amongst his books there was not much of dogmatic or systematic theology and not much of philosophy ; he read widely in biography, perhaps especially in Anglican biography, in history and in literature ; he had a large number of Biblical commentaries and was interested in books that discuss Biblical questions and in such publications as the *Hibbert Journal*. He had a great admiration for Cardinal Newman, who perhaps influenced his preaching, for Newman also kept to great themes and avoided the sensational, and spoke with a fine combination of simplicity and dignity.

Arnold Thomas dearly loved a cheerful book ; he had great sympathy with the man who told Dr. Johnson that he had once tried to be a philosopher himself, " but the cheerfulness would keep breaking through." He complained of Rose Macaulay that " she is a very clever writer to judge by the two or three books I have read. But somehow I feel that she is rather wanting in geniality. . . . I wish there were more pleasant and humorous stories with some humanity in them to be had. But they are not easy to find." He thought Stevenson's style " rather stilted " ; amongst books and authors he liked may be named *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Uncle Remus*, E. V. Lucas, Pett Ridge, W. W. Jacobs, and P. G. Wodehouse.

II.—HIGHBURY

WHEN his father died, "it was fore-ordained that Elisha should take up the mantle of Elijah." He had been received into membership at Highbury on January 1, 1867. On Easter Sunday, April 16, 1876, he preached his first sermon as minister of the Church. In accepting the call he had written, "I feel that Highbury has a claim upon me which I cannot resist. It has a place in my affections which no other Church could have. It is my religious home and birthplace. It contains among its members many of my oldest and most trusted friends. It is the school in which I have learned the most of what I have now to impart. It is endeared to me by the most sacred associations, and, above all, it is closely connected with one great and sacred memory which will be sweet and fragrant and full of inspiration to me so long as I live. The consideration of these things forbids me to refuse it my services, poor and very imperfect though they may be, when they are, as I am assured they are, at this time sincerely and generally desired."

At Highbury he remained for the rest of his life in spite of pressing invitations both to Emmanuel Church, Cambridge, and to a chair at Mansfield College. There never was a happier Church, a happier ministry. "I do love my people, if I may

speak in this simple way, and I value your love more than I can tell you," he wrote in the *Church Manual* of 1909; and in 1910, "There has not been a jarring sound in our Church life. The peace of the church has been unbroken as in former years. We are of one heart and mind." Then he adds characteristically that "peace without passion is never enough. To be spiritually-minded is *life* as well as peace." In the *Church Manual* for 1900, after his Chairmanship of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, he wrote: "I am glad that my official duties are now done with, and that I may give myself with fewer interruptions to the work which lies nearest my heart"; and in 1906: "I have been your minister now for thirty years and I have much cause for thankfulness, though, as I well know, little cause for complacency. How much longer my ministry may continue I cannot tell. . . . I pray God I may never become a burden to you"; in 1908: "I do not think there is a single person amongst us on whose support and affection I may not safely count." "Let me know always," he pleaded with his people, "how I may help you. It is in my heart to be your servant, though I mourn to think how little I am able to do the things I would. Deal frankly with me; and believe in the will, where the deed, for lack of time, or due reflection, remains undone. Forgive me in your goodness all for which I need your forgiveness, and show me how to be more faithful. Bear with me still, my friends, in loving-kindness and all patience so long as we continue to be bound together as minister and people, and pray sometimes

for one whose needs are many, and who knows himself to be compassed with infirmity, that the strength of the Lord may be made perfect in his weakness, and that he may be able to fulfil his ministry in tranquil faith and holy fear." It is not to be wondered at that such a ministry won its rich reward in the affectionate devotion of the church. Highbury was not insensible of the gratitude it owed to God for the gift of Arnold Thomas. Ministers, however, know well how the effectiveness of their ministry and their ability to do the true work of a minister depends upon the Church. The great work which Arnold Thomas did was made possible by the fact that he was always supported by a people who loved and understood him.

If he was faithful with himself, he was faithful also with his people. He praised them often, but he never flattered them nor soothed them with soft words. At a time when their generosity was known far and wide, he wrote to them in a New Year's greeting: "I think I feel less and less inclined to tease anybody for money, and I am not asking now for money for anything in particular. But, you know, we must remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and try to walk in His ways." In 1891 he wrote to them: "Is it not possible that we are putting ourselves a little too much under restraint, and that there is amongst us a certain lack of openness and freedom in speech and fellowship, which is to be regretted? Are we not afraid of each other? . . . How seldom we have anything to say about the things that concern us most deeply, and how seldom we venture to say it! I cannot help thinking that

we are losing much in this way, and that great happiness and power might come to us as a Church if only the ice could be fairly broken, and the deep waters begin to flow. I am afraid we do not get much help from one another, and we might get so much . . . A few simple and broken utterances have sometimes had a strange power to make soft the hearts, and bring tears to the eyes, of those that have listened." He himself spoke with a great directness and a passion of urgency. No one could miss his tenderness and gentleness, but he was not weak or sentimental or afraid. There was always about his speaking a solidity and scorn of unproved statements and easy catchwords, and none could fail to see that his quiet manner covered a fiery intensity of purpose and of feeling.

He was by nature very shy ; but it is remarkable how he overcame his shyness when anyone was in real trouble. A well-known Clifton doctor once said that no one knew Arnold Thomas till he had seen him at the graveside. A close friend writes of his pastoral work : " Once when I was pretty bad with pneumonia, he came to see me. I remember wondering what he was going to say and whether he would offer up a long prayer. As a matter of fact I don't believe he said a word, and he never prayed aloud at all : just sat over the fire for a few minutes in silence, and then left me feeling that his visit had been a comfort and a great kindness. This was a piece of consummate tact, and I know of no one else who could have done it."

His sympathy with men in their troubles and sufferings was full of understanding. His own

experience shines out in these somewhat disjointed notes taken down by a worshipper from a sermon which he preached on Christ the Healer : “ He was desperately tired before He had seen His last patients. Our efforts—they take it out of us ! Even to shake hands sometimes is an effort. Christ must have been tired out when He had got to His bed. Note, a great while before day He arose and went out . . . why ? Was it because He was too tired to sleep ? Perhaps partly ; then all He saw and heard, the cries of the people, the demoniacs, *the sharp, sudden noises*, took it out of Him. So we with hysterical people and those out of their minds . . . you feel worn out, drained. ‘ He sighed.’ It was the overwhelming thought of this and other suffering. Get away and reflect at Tintern, and you may talk about ‘ the still, sad music of humanity,’ but when you are in the midst of it, then there is discordant noise and no sweetness. . . . Our *decent* sympathy ! We are so sorry, we send a nice letter of condolence which takes two minutes to write, a very proper thing to do, but if you *feel* with people . . . Did He heal by simply giving out and communicating His own healing life ? Did they drink in His strength ? Did He carry our sicknesses ? Can we get into relations with Him and drink in His grace ? ” Then he narrated how his father would say that after a day’s preaching he collapsed “ like a balloon.” But, while full of true sympathy, Arnold Thomas was not easily taken in by humbug. He thought nothing of great accomplishments ordinarily so-called ; what appealed to him was naturalness and spontaneity and simplicity. “ It

was perhaps well for some of us," writes one, "that his charity could always be relied upon. Indeed, I think he had rather a liking for naughty people, if they were not Pharisees, and the man with a temper could often find easy access to his heart."

He was loved not least because he could be trusted to speak the truth. He was revered as it is given to few to be revered by those who stand nearest to them, but he sought no personal ascendancy or personal following. He trained the Church for freedom; he did not wish it to depend upon the presence of any man, least of all of himself. He gave himself without stint to Highbury and desired no calls for outside work. He was minister of Highbury for nearly fifty years—

How happily the working days
In this dear service fly!

"I cannot look far ahead," he wrote in 1917. "I have been telling my Church Secretary that, now I am well within reach of an old age pension, it is really time for me to sink into oblivion. I think I shall probably put my resignation in the hands of my deacons soon, that they may feel quite free. But then I remember Balfour and the Archbishop, who are just my age, and wonder whether I, too, ought not to struggle on still for a little." He did struggle on for nearly six more years. Next year he wrote: "It is difficult to think of myself as seventy, but I suppose one gets accustomed to anything. I do not, however, feel old. Perhaps the even tenor of my life partly accounts for this. The years slip by imperceptibly. I do not wish to

quit this earthly scene just yet, though the world is full of tragedies. . . . I am bicycling again a great deal, and hope to get about in the country pretty often." On September 1st of the same year he wrote: "The rain of July has made the Down very green, and I am enjoying the bluebells, which are dotted all over it. I am in a wicked mood this Sunday morning, and propose to have a quiet day not assembling myself together with my fellow sinners. . . . There is much to think of, and to prepare for, in view of the coming autumn and winter. I want to make a good end of my ministry, but the times are, and will be, difficult. . . . I mean to take for the morning next Sunday, 'It is high time to awake.' It really is high time."

On May 28, 1923, he wrote a letter of resignation to the church: "I need not say that nothing could trouble me more than any fear that I were indulging my own feeling by clinging unduly to my office to the hurt of the Church and congregation." Mr. F. H. Ballard had been appointed his colleague in 1921, and the fear that Arnold Thomas might be a burden to the Church could be in no one's mind, but the Church felt bound to accept his resignation. "I came to feel rather suddenly that, having come to the ripe age of seventy-five, it was best for me to let Ballard have the saddle to himself. We have gone along very amicably, but he does not quite get his opportunity so long as there is a divided authority. . . . They are making me 'Pastor Emeritus.' We none of us know what exactly it means, but it suggests some sort of continued connection with the Church. . . . I do not like the idea of struggling

on to the end while people ask in wonder why does he not get out of the way. I am hoping to do some useful work, but just for the present I am keeping in the background." But all men knew that it was not given to a letter of resignation nor to death itself to sunder the bond that bound him to his people.

III.—MESSAGE AND PREACHING

WHAT then was the message that he preached through all these years, and what the doctrine upon which he built up the church and congregation ?

This is not altogether an easy question to answer. Arnold Thomas belonged to no school of theology and embraced no system of doctrine ; indeed, he found systematic theology a somewhat dry and unedifying study. His father brought him up to know a religion that was both evangelical and free, and Arnold Thomas, who was religious to the depths of his being, was exceedingly sceptical of all theological formulæ and systems. It was his own lot, as Professor Armitage says ¹ “ to wrestle for foothold every step of the way he had to tread through the difficult years of his lifetime. This fact I think it was that made his message to us so simple, so irresistible. All things that could be shaken were removed from it, and there shone forth great luminous words to which at once, and of necessity, our hearts bore witness.” In a lecture on Anselm he once observed : “ It may be the more we try to follow the intricacies of a mind like Anselm’s, the more we become aware how impossible it is by searching to find out God.” “ I do feel,”

¹ *Congregational Quarterly*, October 1924.

he wrote, " that when we try to explain the Trinity in terms of abstract thought we get out of our depth." " I am weary of the everlasting speculation about the Synoptics."

But such scepticism did not lead him, as it has led many, to abandon the effort and exercise of thought and to accept dogma upon authority, believing where he could not see. He believed that the Christian Faith is essentially reasonable because it appeals to the deepest intuitions of the human heart and satisfies that religious instinct or hunger which God has implanted in man. Christian doctrine is reasonable in that " it suits men, when their conscience and spirit are awake ; that it proves itself to be adapted to the deepest necessities of their nature ; that it fits in with the laws and tendencies of their moral constitution ; that being humbly and heartily accepted, it is found to be the secret of their peace, the fulfilment of their joy, the interpretation of their spiritual instincts, the key to the strange riddle of their existence." ¹ In November 1923 he wrote : " I was brought up when Bain's thorough-going materialism was very much in favour. But I do not think that either philosophy or science or reason can really help us much in our religion. They cannot do more than indicate probabilities. . . . I think one has to rely mainly on a spiritual instinct, e.g. on faith, as Hebrews defines it, the ' evidence of things not seen,' and to trust this instinct in view of the general history of mankind, and of the experiences and aspirations of

¹ *Three Questions*, p. 20, Simpkin, Marshall Hamilton, Kent & Co.

the best men. One has to take a large view of things. For myself, I can say, as Coleridge did, that the New Testament—he said the ‘Bible’—‘finds me.’ That is, while I accept freely all that Criticism has to say, and admit that there are many difficulties in the N.T., yet, when I turn to it with anything like humility and openness of mind, I do feel that the best we know of life and its meaning is there. Take it as a whole, note the prevailing spirit and purpose, whether in Gospel or Epistle, and I feel that the attitude of mind towards life which it suggests, and its essential conception of God as the Eternal, revealing Himself to man, in human form—the only way that could be acceptable to us—satisfy us as I can find satisfaction nowhere else. Indeed, if I should discard it all as myth and fancy, the world seems to me a very dull and dreary kind of place.”

Christianity is reasonable, but it is apprehended by faith, and it is simple. “Forsyth has sent me his last book. There is a lot in it, but there is a sense of strain about it that makes it hard reading. One cannot believe that Christianity is quite so complicated and subtle.” His own creed was very simple: it was faith in God through Jesus Christ. “Here then is the authority that satisfies me. I trouble myself little about questions of Biblical criticism. They have no power to disturb my faith or my peace. It is a small matter to me whether there are two Isaiahs or one. I depend on no particular theory of inspiration. For that matter, I need no theory at all. I feel sure that I know enough of what Jesus was, and of what he

taught, to warrant my trusting Him when He speaks of things that are beyond my reach. So much of what He teaches verifies itself in my own experience, that I am prepared to accept His word when He passes beyond the limit to which my experience has hitherto reached." And again: "I am not sure that we shall ever quite know exactly how it is that God reconciles us to Himself by the death of Christ. But amid all the mystery there is a fact there that the secret soul of man can lay hold of, in the darkness, to his infinite comfort, and apprehending, though not comprehending, can abide in peace."

It might be expected that with this undogmatic background his faith might have been little more than a pale and wistful hope, the vague creation of his kindly sentiments. Nothing could be farther from the facts. There was no more truly evangelical ministry in the land; he reasoned with men with urgency and passion, and pleaded with them to be reconciled to God. He might well have sat for that portrait of the true minister which Mr. Interpreter showed to Christian in the "private room," the picture "of a very grave person, . . . and this was the fashion of it. It had eyes lifted up to Heaven, the best of Books in his hand, the law of Truth was written upon his lips, the World was behind his back. It stood as if it pleaded with me, and a Crown of Gold did hang over his head." Arnold Thomas's preaching was searching and terrible sometimes in its directness, though there was always a winning and appealing note in it; he never denounced, but he had the faithfulness of all true love. "Do not, therefore, be deceived.

You must, sooner or later, take up the cross and go after Christ, and better sooner than later, and better to-day than to-morrow. Why not take the decisive step at once? Why these foolish delays, this weak, this sinful refusal to bear the sacred yoke by which alone the soul may come to its inheritance of life and peace? "When Dr. Johnson was at a place of amusement, he said that 'it went to his heart to consider that there was not one in all that brilliant circle that was not afraid to go home and think.' . . . Oh! the cowards that we are! And what folly there is in such cowardice! For we cannot always escape from ourselves. The truth must come out at last. Some day all other things that claim and absorb our attention will fall away, and we shall be left alone—alone with our hearts, with our history stretching out behind us, incapable of being hidden any more, with the meaning of it plain enough, both as regards its general drift and its pitiful details. And if there is to come such a day of revelation, is it not better now, when some kind of amendment may be possible, to tear away the coverings which hide our souls from ourselves, that we may see what that buried life is which flows on for ever, below all the fret and excitement, the striving and the toiling of our busy days, and by the direction of which our character is being shaped and our destiny determined?" And, later: "Put away your pride; let yourself go; trust yourself to Christ, as the birds trust themselves to the air, as the ship when it is launched commits itself to the buoyant water. Fling open wide the gates, and let that King of Glory come in, that Lord of all power

and might, that Sun and dear Saviour of the soul, let Him come in, and see whether the effect of that self-abandonment will not be that you shall be filled with His fulness and saved by His life.”¹

This leads naturally to some account of his preaching. None who saw him will forget his appearance in the pulpit, his beautiful face, his tall figure wrapped in a long Geneva gown “like a great ship in full sail.” His delivery was rapid, especially in his earlier years; he had no tricks of rhetoric and few gestures. Sometimes he would raise his hand in appeal or promise, but constantly his hands rested on the pulpit ledge, himself swaying a little as he spoke, and his eyes closing for a moment now and then. He would lean upon the Book, and talk to the congregation as a father to his children; his hands clasped now and his fingers moving constantly; he would be expounding some view obvious and natural, but not quite the Christian view; then he would raise himself up and say, “and yet . . .”; that was a very favourite phrase: “It is not only the poor homes we read of in reports that need improving—you put down the fault to the minister; well, perhaps they are a poor lot, and yet . . .” He spoke, or seemed to speak, with extreme ease. In telling a story he had the artist’s gift to select that detail which gives life and reality to a tale. He had, moreover, a musical voice with fine tone and good cadences. He invited the attention of his hearers not by oratory but by a sweet and moving reasonableness, speaking to men of the eternal verities, and, as he spoke, the right words seemed

¹ *The Way of Life*, pp. 19 ff. 46 f. James Clarke, 1899.

to come without effort, searching all hearts. His sermons were, perhaps, his greatest ministry; he was so direct, both to wound and to heal.

If in earlier years he usually wrote his sermons, he did not often read them, and his freedom from the manuscript gave opportunity for the play of his personality, his homely but always beautiful phraseology, his humour. His addresses to the children were very serious but often couched in the language of a gentle playfulness. On one occasion he astonished his congregation by telling the children that if he could choose what he could be, he thought that he would prefer the office of "mother's help"; it was irresistibly incongruous, but I do not think it seemed incongruous to him, and certainly it was not said to raise a laugh. Many will remember his week-night addresses in the lecture-hall; in his later years, at least, he gave no long time to the preparation of these; he spoke simply and spontaneously out of the fulness of a heart that dwelt much on heavenly things, and grace was upon his lips. His speaking was entirely unaffected, but there was a dignity and quiet beauty about the sentences that seemed to flow so easily from him.

He had no prejudice against the use of a liturgy in public worship, and he sometimes used one, especially during the war, but he had in a most wonderful degree the power to carry men with him into the presence of God when he led the congregation in vocal prayer; he spoke to God with a solemn reverence and yet as a child to his most wise and loving father. He was the living proof that there is no vulgarity in the Free Church forms of worship

where there is no vulgarity in the soul of him who leads it. He loved the dignity of the simple and homely forms to which he was accustomed, and he saw to it that the service, reading and prayer, hymn and sermon, were a unity.

It has been said of him that his pulpit was "a throne of human felicity," as Johnson once called a very different institution. If this came to be so, yet he was not always conscious of the felicity. In his humorous way he often told of a letter which as a young minister he received one Monday morning from a correspondent who asserted that he had come hungry to the services of the previous day, and had gone away "uninterested, unedified and unblest"! and there is a note written by him in a letter of his early days which should be of comfort to many ministers¹: "Last Sunday I was at the new Clapton Chapel. . . . Mr. Binney was just in front of me in the evening and, of course, made me wretched. . . . I wish I could say that I was getting on well, but alas! I get sometimes into a condition of absolute despair. Sermon-writing is torture and the anticipation of public work usually misery, but I suppose all men, all young men at least, feel the same, and it does not do to complain. I am sure I do not wonder that so few men give themselves to the work. I believe the number would be much smaller if they knew beforehand all the wretched experiences through which the prosecution of it must lead them. Perhaps I suffer more than others because of my nervous and irritable temperament, but I cannot pretend to find pleasure in my work,

¹ September 29, 1871.

or to be fond of my profession. I think the one redeeming point would be the assurance that one was in the right place and doing good, but this seems very hard to ascertain. However, no useful end will be served by all this croaking. I trust things will look brighter as I grow older." This hope was indeed fulfilled ; he came to find if not exactly pleasure yet infinite satisfaction and joy in his work ; but I suppose he never appeared in any pulpit or upon any platform except under a sense of duty ; he took no pleasure in the sound of his own voice or in the applause which often greeted him. He was shy and diffident to the end, and both in his shrinking and his courage like the prophet Jeremiah : " Ah, Lord God, behold I am a child, I cannot speak. . . . Whithersoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Behold, I have appointed thee to be a prophet."

He set before himself a high standard of preaching. " You may, indeed, gather together a parcel of odds and ends, from all quarters, and label the parcel with a text. . . . But that is not preaching," he told the students at Brecon¹ ; but he was well aware of how little use is preaching if the preacher do not himself embody and exemplify his doctrine. " I am sure you will from your hearts acknowledge," he continues in the same address, " that, if one may so far modify Milton's words, he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true ' sermon,' that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things." This was a point to which he

¹ June 1888.

always returned. "We can be so good," he said on another occasion,¹ "so terribly, painfully, unbearably good, and yet so far from nice. A saint can be such an uncomfortable person to live with. It is goodness of the pleasant kind, which, after all . . . is the proper kind, that some of us zealous Christian workers are needing so badly. . . . It does not need much goodness to preach. Anybody can preach who has a knack of saying pretty things, and some amount of volubility. It is a simple business so long as you are safely shut up in a pulpit. But if you are to move about among the people freely as their companion and friend, then, truly, you do need to be good if you are to serve them in the noblest ways. I don't say that you may not be useful to them as a piece of string is useful or a pocket-knife or a scrubbing brush. . . . But we would all like to count for a little more than this among our fellows. . . . But if you would be useful to men as you would like ; if you would help them into the Kingdom of Heaven, which is beyond measure the greatest service which any man can render to his neighbour, if you would do that, how good you must be, how *nice* you must be, how gentle, how forbearing, how reasonable, how high-minded, how humble, how full of brotherly kindness ! . . . It is easy to talk about the Gospel ; it is another and much harder matter to live the Gospel. It is easy to become eloquent on the glories and felicities of Heaven ; it is another thing to be of such a disposition as that men will feel when they come into personal contact with you that the

¹ *Broad Plain House Papers VIII*, pp. 17 ff.

Kingdom of Heaven is come nigh unto them.” “ Goodness of the pleasant kind, which, after all, is the proper kind ”—that was the kind of goodness which Arnold Thomas exemplified in the most abundant manner. His was “ the righteousness evangelical.” He received the reverence and even adulation of multitudes ; yet there was nothing in him of conceit or complacency ; he was unaffectedly good and kind, and had a vast store of sterling common sense and a delicious humour.

To return to his preaching, he held that “ the prevailing note in any Christian ministry should be the note of joy and hope, and I trust I have not too often allowed myself to fall into a pensive strain.” He never made a false appeal to the emotions of his hearers. He admirably obeyed that precept of the Apostle to the Colossians which he thus translated : “ Conduct yourselves with prudence in your relations with unbelievers. Make the best of every opportunity that comes in your way of doing good, and let your conversation with them be such as to attract, while it is not wanting in point and power.” He was much influenced doubtless by his father’s preaching, of which he wrote :¹ “ He was eminently practical and logical. . . . What he cared for, and wanted other people to care for, was the sober, solemn truth ; and without rhetoric, without ornament, in the simplest and most convincing way that was possible to him, he drove home the very serious things he had to say to the conscience and understanding of his hearers. He talked to them as a man of affairs would talk to his

¹ *Congregational Quarterly*, January 1923.

associates on a pressing matter of business, or as a father would talk to his children of dangers the gravity of which they did not sufficiently realize." That was true of his own preaching also. He never spoke above his people's heads ; he never talked down to them ; his appeal was always to the insight of the heart. His preaching was always on central themes ; it was always personal, always pointing men to Christ.

IV.—MISSIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD

THE services at Highbury were a strength and inspiration to a wide circle, but Arnold Thomas was by no means satisfied with that. He was a true "Knight of the Holy Ghost." "It is vain," he said, "to keep up a round of quiet and beautiful services in the church if men are ignorant and in misery, are sinning and dying outside. No true shepherd cares only for the flock that is secure within the fold. He goes out into the mountains after the sheep that have gone astray." No cause lay nearer to his heart than the work which Highbury instituted in St. Philip's round the Broad Plain House, first under the wardenship of his cousin, Mr. (now Professor) George Hare Leonard, and now for many years of Mr. Newton Colborne. "We cannot do all that we would for the redemption of mankind," he once said, "but let us not fail to do what we can. A little honest doing is worth a great deal of sentimental deploring." The Broad Plain work for which Highbury has been in the main responsible is "a little honest doing," which has accomplished very much for Bristol and brought light and meaning into scores of lives in a district which, when the work started, was one of the most sordid in the city. "There," he said,¹ "our young

¹ *Church Manual*, 1906.

people are mainly to be found, and there lies our most important field of action." Indeed, in the following year he even had to remind his people of the necessities of the Mother Church: "If ever I feel at all discouraged, it puts me in heart again when I go to the Plain, and take note of all that my dear friends are doing there. But I think we must not allow ourselves to become so absorbed in this work as to forget our own Church and its claims." The necessity for this warning is itself a remarkable testimony to the missionary zeal which he had infused into the Church.

He always enjoyed his visits to "the Plain." Particularly he delighted to be present at the club suppers or to meet the children. If he had to leave a meeting early, there was a story he delighted to tell of a certain Welsh sermon. "The writer of that sermon described in the most graphic way the perplexity and consternation of Enoch's wife on the evening of the day on which her husband disappeared. He pictured her going from house to house among her neighbours, and asking this one and that whether he or she had seen anything of her husband, and re-echoed her plaintive exclamation that they had been married three hundred years, and that she had never known her husband out so late at night before." He would then add that if he were not allowed to leave the meeting before the end someone might be heard in Clifton asking: "Has anyone seen my Arnold? Here we have been married these forty years, and he has never been out so late before!"

Mr. Colborne's last memory of him at Broad

Plain is the sight of him standing surrounded by children who were all eagerly showing him their cards and talking so excitedly, and he like a father in the midst of them.

Apart from Broad Plain and the associated work at Anvil Street, he took the greatest interest in the smaller mission at Salmon Street, which looked to Highbury for support and guidance ; he was for many years Joint Secretary of the Congregational Union of Gloucester and Hereford, and was the trusted adviser both of ministers and Churches, exercising an apostolical oversight none the less valuable for being entirely spiritual and unofficial. He once jestingly said that no little chapel could even instal a new organ without getting him to perform the ceremony. He was at his best when he went to preach in the village chapels round about Bristol. He would make the most delightful speeches at the luncheon of the County Union meetings and keep the whole company in roars of laughter. On one occasion Mr. Robert Nott, following Thomas Binney, had suggested that it would be a salutary rule if ministers, on attaining the age of sixty, were put in the gallery of the chapel and solemnly shot by the deacons. Arnold Thomas at once replied that he would be delighted to take his place in the gallery under these conditions, being satisfied that none of his deacons could hit him at that distance ! He had a sincere regard and affection for his brother ministers, but he was not blind to their foibles ; one who had, as he said, " the gift of endless exposition " he once encouraged in the following terms : " I must congratulate you, Mr. X, on your wonderful

power of self-control in contenting yourself with so short a sermon."

He served also the whole Congregational denomination, though he shunned publicity, and was known to speak of "the religious non-observance of the May meetings." He was Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1899; when the meetings were held in Bristol, he wistfully reminded his audience that, when his father had held that office before him, three barrels of beer had been broached for the assembled ministers. Dr. J. D. Jones said of him quite truly that "when we Congregational folk had any act of special sacredness and solemnity to perform, we instinctively turned to Arnold Thomas as the man to do it." But, as the Bishop of Bristol said,¹ "Arnold Thomas was not yours alone; he was ours." He was, as Canon Gamble truly remarks, "a builder of bridges between people who thought themselves hopelessly divided." He belonged indeed to all the Churches, and he belonged to Bristol. He was jealous for the honour of the city which he loved. He served on many committees, especially hospital committees, and it was an outward sign of the city's respect for him when the University gave him the degree of Doctor of Laws.

"A man ought to care for his own city," he said in a sermon. "He ought to take some pride in it, if there is anything, and there is always something, to be proud of; he ought to be willing to serve it, though it may be at some personal inconvenience. He ought to be prepared to make sacrifices for the

¹ At his funeral.

sake of it. . . . What concern have we shown for the honour and prosperity of Bristol? Bristol is not, perhaps, one of the famous cities of the world. It is not Rome or Athens or Jerusalem. We lay no claim to such pre-eminent distinction. And yet it is no mean city. If Jerusalem was beautiful for situation, so is Bristol. What town in England has fairer surroundings? Have you never come home from your summer holiday and strolled across the Down on an autumn evening, when the tide has been high, and the setting sun has glorified the river and the distant channel and the Welsh hills, and said to yourself, 'We have seen nothing, after all, to beat this in all our travels'? And it is an ancient and historic city, full of memories of the past and possessing many charms. . . . And, apart from all this, it is our own city. Here many of us were born; here are the sepulchres of our fathers; here we have lived and laboured, and here we expect to end our days. It is the city of our birth or of our adoption, and it ill becomes us to be careless of its welfare. But how much do we care for it? Where is our public spirit? I will not bring charges lightly against my fellow-citizens, but I will admit that I have heard complaints from time to time of a strange apathy, an indifference much to be lamented, on the part of the Bristol people to the public interest." He then referred to the School Board, the Municipal Buildings, the lack of picture galleries, a museum, music, defects which have since in some degree been remedied. He continued: "Do you ask, what has all this to do with religion? I reply, it has a great deal to do with religion. For when a man

gets religion, if it be Christ's religion, he becomes, necessarily, a public man. . . . He has passed from death unto life, and the proof of it is that he loves the brethren, and, loving them, is willing to do all that is in his power for the promotion of their happiness. It is no sign of your heavenly-mindedness that you have lost all interest in the affairs of the city. If you were a good Christian, you would be a good citizen. It has a great deal to do with religion, this love of one's neighbour. It is religion, if the love be that true love which is born of God."

But the love of Bristol was no narrowing affection. He was touched with a sense of the sorrows and longings of all human hearts. "We are debtors to these brethren far away," he said,¹ "and the great debt that we owe to them is that, if we know anything of the power and sufficiency of Jesus Christ, of the peace that passes all understanding, and the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, of the hope that maketh not ashamed, and the riches that are unsearchable, of the marvellous liberty of the children of God, and of that life which is life indeed—that, if we know anything of these things, we should declare to them what we have seen and heard." "If we know anything of these things"—he knew much of them; hence the support and furtherance of foreign missions was to him not so much a duty, still less a problem, as one of the consuming interests and passions of his life. His interest began early. He recalled an ancient record: "Master Thomas (that's me!) gave fourpence for sending five million Testaments to China. But,"

¹ Colonial Missionary Society Sermon, October 13, 1910.

he added, " I am afraid it was not altogether voluntary." If his interest was not voluntary at first, it soon became so. His notebooks testify to the care which he took to acquaint himself so far as possible with the work abroad. " The minister," he wrote,¹ " will never think it enough to turn his attention, or his people's attention, to this department of the Church's work only at the time of the anniversary. All the year round he will have it in view. He will be so familiar with missionary literature that illustrations of the ordinary themes of his sermons drawn from the mission field will be constantly coming into his mind, and he will not be content simply to use these illustrations. If he sometimes preaches sermons on Abraham, or Moses, or Jacob, he will often feel that it is equally profitable to preach sermons on Livingstone, or Morrison, or Moffat, or Chalmers, and it will not trouble or discourage him at all to be told that these are not ' Bible characters.' " The first advice he gave to ministers in this matter is of more importance than can be realized by any but those who are in close touch with missionaries : " First let the minister make it evident that he regards his missionary brother as one who is to be honoured and loved for his work's sake. I remember how in my early days the missionary was regarded in my own home, and I remember, when I came to Bristol to succeed my father, the attitude that my neighbour, Urijah Thomas, then Secretary of the Bristol Missionary Society, maintained towards the missionaries who came to the

¹ In *The Chronicle*, published by the London Missionary Society, March 1921.

anniversary services—how he welcomed them in the name of the Churches, how he made them feel that they were honoured guests, what a genial atmosphere he created. He could do that kind of thing as few men can. But any man who sincerely feels, as he did, may take the trouble, if he will, to give expression to his feeling, and it is well worth doing. These things count for much”¹ This advice was the transcript of his own long practice. He did not think it right or fair that missionaries, when they return home on furlough from their long and arduous and often dispiriting labours, should be expected to create missionary interest in the Christian Church; the Churches rather should revive the flagging spirits and rekindle the dimming eye of the missionaries, and send them back rejoicing on their way.

Arnold Thomas’s whole heart was in the missionary cause, but he was not that type of enthusiast who alienates the sympathies of the rest of the world: “Every enthusiast,” he said, “is in danger of being looked on as a bore sometimes. But we must try to bore men as little as possible. It is not a helpful way of serving a good cause.” And again: “I remember that story that was told at the Council Meetings at Boston twenty years ago of the missionary to the Maories who, returning from a holiday, found one of his converts missing. He made inquiries, and was told ‘he gave us so much good advice that we had to eat him up.’ We all get tired of much good advice.”

Arnold Thomas, because he was truly human,

¹ In *The Chronicle*, published by the London Missionary Society, March 1921.

understood the hearts of all men ; the missionaries' task is " to rid those poor people of the burden of their sin, to deliver them from the stain of it and the shame of it, to lift them out of the dust, to make new creatures of them, to bring them into the household of Christ, to make them shine with the glory of His grace, to dower them with the faith, the hope, the love of the saints—to save them."

The anniversary meetings were a great event each year in Bristol, a festival week : " I have always preached in the morning in my own pulpit on these occasions, the only exceptions being once when I was in America and once when I was ill. No doubt better sermons might have been preached by one of the visiting missionaries, and I do not suggest that others should adopt this course, but I do feel it to be important that the congregation should realize that the advocacy of the cause is an essential part of the minister's own work. It has been my practice, too, to make the Sunday preceding the Missionary Sunday a day of preparation. We have always felt that the collection has a kind of sacramental character, is an act of solemn worship, needing to be anticipated with serious reflection and a proper sense of responsibility." If a minister " deals honestly with this question, he may come to realize rather sorrowfully that he is only a second best, but he will want to make the second best as good as possible." But it is chiefly by prayer that ordinary people can directly partake in missionary work. " But alas ! prayer meetings are sometimes deadly dull " ; yet it need not be so : " A Missionary prayer meeting may often give us the life and variety

we need. It brings us into contact with great movements, vast issues, world-wide needs and sorrows. And when it is over we may go home with the peace that a man always enjoys when he has been taken clean out of himself, and with the conviction that something really happened at that little meeting, when we went to the Lord of the Harvest and spoke to Him about His own business." I suppose that no event in his ministry gave him more joy and satisfaction than when, in connection with the Jubilee celebrations at Highbury Chapel, a new "Highbury Chapel" was built under the supervision of Mr. W. G. Terrell in the heart of China. It can scarcely be too much to say that under Arnold Thomas's ministry Highbury Chapel has been a source of blessing far and wide in Asia and in Africa, and Mr. Ballard was right in saying that "his death will be mourned in China, Africa, and the lands beyond the seas as much as it is being mourned at home."

V.—CHRISTIAN UNITY

THERE is one more concern which lay near to his heart, and to which he returned again and again—the Church of Christ, its nature and its unity. His ideals and efforts in this connection constituted, perhaps, his most important contribution to the thought of our time.

No one ever loved controversy less than Arnold Thomas, yet he was constantly engaged in it, especially with the Church of England; he never wavered in his convictions and principles, yet at his funeral the Bishop of Bristol, speaking in Highbury Chapel, said: "We of the Church of England shall feel that we have lost an understanding friend." Controversy with Arnold Thomas was never bitter controversy. "His," says Professor Armitage,¹ "was the method of a reasonableness that had always a great deal of liking in it for the man he was reasoning with, and he was at all times ready to stop discussion and become human again, and friendly, and even to break out into a laugh at the absurdity of all this disputing. . . . He belonged to the Church Catholic in all its sundered parts." There was nothing of the sectarian about him, and he took no pleasure in being a Dissenter. "There is no good reason why we should continue to be Non-

¹ *Congregational Quarterly*, October 1924.

conformists, and I trust the time will come when we shall no more be known by that name. I confess I do not relish the name. Our Nonconformity, after all, is but an accident, and is by no means of our essence. . . . We, I trust, are something more than that." When he said that Nonconformists lost much by their Nonconformity, he was not thinking of temporal disabilities alone; he had an unfeigned affection for the Church of England. "Whoever may be right, and whoever may be wrong, in these religious debates," he held, "those certainly are in the wrong who lose their temper and violate the fundamental law of charity"; and again: "We will take up the sword if we must, but God help us ever to be busy with the trowel, to build, build, build, unwearingly, in love and faith and holy zeal, the glorious temple of the living God."

Arnold Thomas had a singular felicity of firmness and uncompromising fidelity to principle, coupled with humour and geniality and affection. When the Anglican Church Congress met in Bristol shortly after his return from America, he headed the Free Church deputation to the Congress, and welcomed the archbishops, bishops and clergy in the name of the Free Churches. In the course of his address he said many kind and appreciative things of the Church of England; then he added: "A little while ago some of my American hosts were in England and I had to return courtesies, and I naturally took them to St. Paul's and secured the services of one of the vergers. In conversation with him I said: 'I suppose it is an excellent position you have here.' He said: 'Yes, yes—there is only

one drawback ; I can never get to a place of worship ! ' ' It was after this address that the Archbishop of Canterbury sent him an urgent message that he must see him and have a talk with him while he was in Bristol. This meeting led to some further conference and correspondence.

On another occasion the Bishop of Bristol was present at the meeting of the Congregational Union in Bristol. The meeting was at an end, and according to Anglican etiquette it would have been a great discourtesy not to ask the bishop to pronounce the benediction. Arnold Thomas was the very soul of courtesy, but he was a Congregationalist by principle ; it was a delicate situation, but he was equal to it ; at the appropriate moment he announced that he would ask the Bishop of Bristol, " as the youngest bishop present, " to pronounce the benediction.

Arnold Thomas's sympathies were wide, but in the controversy with Catholicism he stood decisively on the Protestant side. " The Protestant controversy, " he said, " is not a question of detail at all, but of the essential nature of the religion of Jesus Christ. " Again : " The Catholic, whether Roman or Anglican, believes in the ' priest, ' and magnifies the priestly office. We, on the other hand, do not believe in the priest, nor do we admit that he has any place or office at all in the Kingdom of Christ. " ¹ Once more : " It was a saying of Richard Baxter that the plague of the Church for above a thousand years had been the enlarging of our Creed and making more fundamentals than God ever made. . . .

¹ *Three Questions*, p. 34.

Cardinal Newman tells us that about the year 1823 the Rev. William James, then Fellow of Oriel, taught him the doctrine of Apostolical Succession in the course of a walk round Christ Church Meadow, and that he listened with some impatience. . . . Now one may say that it has been added to the Creed and is regarded as a fundamental article. And I doubt whether there is any belief prevailing at the present day which is a greater hindrance to the coming of the Kingdom of God than this belief. For it is fatal to that unity of spirit and abiding peace among Christian people without which the work of the Church can never be effectually accomplished, and has brought heart-burnings and distractions into the ranks of the army of the living God. Probably there is no heresy which is more injurious to the best interests of the Church. How much trouble and confusion, and how many melancholy errors, would have been avoided if Christian teachers . . . had remembered how anxious the Apostle was that the ambassadors of Christ should give no heed to fables and endless genealogies which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith." These statements are uncompromising enough, though they involved no personal hostility towards those who differed from them. But Arnold Thomas always believed that the Church of England is at heart, or at least in very large and true measure, a Protestant Church. Yet it is a fatal weakness to be in any degree in two minds upon these fundamental questions. "Here lies what I feel to be the great weakness of the Church of England. She has much to show that is venerable, beautiful, noble,

captivating, but she does not know, and she has never known since the time of the Reformation, her own mind. She does not know whether she recognizes the priest or not. She speaks with no authority on the subject. The question is a fundamental one, but she leaves it undecided. . . . I do find the priest in the Prayer Book. I cannot say otherwise, honestly. He is not made very conspicuous, but still he is there. And therefore, in spite of all the Protestant teaching of the Articles, I must say I find it a little difficult to make common cause with the Evangelicals in their conflict with the Catholic party in their own Church—a party which appears to me to have as much right to be in the Church as they have.”

Controversy he would avoid as far as he could ; he pursued the apostolic precept so far as possible to live at peace with all men ; but he could speak strongly when need arose. On December 1, 1866, he addressed the following letter to Mr. (later Arch-deacon) Wilson, who was at that time Headmaster of Clifton College :—

MY DEAR MR. WILSON,—

I see in to-day's *Daily Press* a report of a Church defence meeting at Redcliff, at which the usual theories as to the property of the Church were propounded.

I cannot resist an impulse to tell you how deeply sensible I am of the mischief and sorrow that must ensue if this kind of thing is permitted to continue in Bristol. So far as I know, not a word has been said by any Nonconformist in this neighbourhood on a question which most of us feel must be decided not by partisans on either side but by historians and Constitutional lawyers duly appointed for the purpose. But, if it be publicly stated, again and again and again, and the reports of such

statements be printed in the newspapers, that the money given in pre-Reformation times by those who were chiefly anxious for the redemption of their souls, or the souls of their friends, from the pains of hell or purgatory, was given for the use of the Church of England of to-day, and that the Church of England has, in equity, any kind of exclusive claim to it, then we shall be bound to speak. And there will be controversies raging in Bristol which must do incalculable harm. You are provoking us to make appeals to the people, which we should make with great reluctance, partly because we know with what readiness vast numbers will respond to them, who will not be influenced by the highest motives, but who will easily be persuaded that the identity of the Church of the Middle Ages with the Anglican Church of to-day is a mere fiction, and that the Anglican Church is appropriating funds to which all the Churches at least have an equal claim, as being equally inheritors of the early Christian life in England.

You know how unwilling some of us are to stir up strife, but we cannot allow public statements, which seem to us to be absurdly inaccurate and unjust, to be wholly unchallenged.

Yours very truly,

H. ARNOLD THOMAS.

In this case, by the good offices of Mr. Wilson and the bishop, serious trouble was avoided.

Arnold Thomas lived on the friendliest terms with the bishops of Bristol; even with them he thought plain speaking to be sometimes necessary. "I have been having a pretty little quarrel with the Bishop," he wrote once, ". . . And now he wants me to lunch with him and the Dean to-morrow that we may try and put things straight. . . . I dare say we shall get reconciled." And a few days later: "You ask about the lunch. Well, there were no bloody noses, and I think we parted friends in spite of some plain speaking. We lunched at the

Liberal Club, and many wondering eyes were turned in our direction. Our old friend X came up, and said he was glad to see us in conference, but I explained that I was trying to convert two heretics. . . . So we went on hammer and tongs for a good hour. I hope good was done, and not harm. . . . I do not want to quarrel with him, but I wanted him to realize that we too had our susceptibilities." To revive now the story of this particular "incident" would seem to serve no purpose of which Arnold Thomas would approve, but these excerpts from his letters at the time indicate with what seriousness and with what good humour he entered into controversy when he felt it needful.

In a letter dated March 19, 1904, the sentence occurs, "This afternoon my worldly goods—some of them—are to be sold in a neighbouring coach-house. . . . It seems rather farcical, but I suppose this kind of thing has to be done." He was, as he said, no law-breaker by nature, but he felt it his duty to be a Passive Resister to the Education Act of 1902. He had been a member of the Nonconformist deputation that had waited upon Mr. Balfour, as he then was, and had explained to him that Nonconformists would not submit to the proposals which he was laying before Parliament; but the protests were unavailing, and there was great bitterness throughout the country. It was all eminently distasteful to Arnold Thomas, but he did not shrink from his duty as he understood it. "I wish to say that it is no happiness to some of us to be engaged in this controversy. God knows it is certainly no happiness to me. During the quarter of a century

that I have been a minister in Bristol, it has been my desire and aim, as it was the desire and aim of my father before me, to live on terms of friendship and good will with all Christian people. But we must look facts in the face, and I cannot but feel that during the last few months the most cherished convictions of Nonconformists have been lightly tossed aside, and that a direct challenge to their conscience has been wantonly thrown down. And if we were to submit meekly to these things, it would not be meekness ; it would be rather to play the traitor and the coward. The fight must go on, therefore.” But the spirit in which he fought this battle as all others is indicated in the fact that, when Welsh Disestablishment became the law of the land, he suggested in a letter to *The Times*, dated January 12, 1915, that the question of Welsh *Disendowment* should be dropped. In regard to the Education controversy he did his best to get the matter settled by consent, and he wrote a letter to *The Times* of such importance, in view of the likely recrudescence of that controversy at the present time, that it will be well to quote it *in extenso*.

TO THE EDITOR OF *The Times*.

SIR,—

There is one possible solution of the religious difficulty in our elementary schools which, I believe, has not received consideration, but which is, I venture to think, worthy of the attention of those who are anxious to see this complicated question settled in a reasonable and Christian spirit.

The arrangement now contemplated appears to be that certain doctrines, comprising what is called “Fundamental Christianity,” should be taught in all the schools, but that those matters

in dispute among Christian people should be excluded and dealt with elsewhere. This is the principle of the Jamaica catechism, which "omits of set purpose all reference to the distinctive teaching of any one denomination, and particularly to the doctrines concerning the Christian Church and the Sacraments."

But why should all reference to such distinctive doctrines be excluded? Why should not the children be taught, in an intelligent and impartial way, what are the beliefs of the great religious communions of this country in regard to the Church and the Sacraments? Is it not of importance that they should grow up with some knowledge on these subjects? Is there no advantage in their knowing how far Christians are agreed, and on what points they differ? There are certain catechisms in use at present in which the views and principles of those with whom the compilers have had no sympathy are described with an animus which can produce no good result, and which, of course, makes such catechisms impossible in schools supported by the general public. But why should not the child be taught in simple, just, and moderate language what the Anglican believes, and what the Nonconformists believe? Any wise parent, if he were asked by his children what was the difference between Churchmen and Dissenters, would be anxious to do justice in his answer to both parties. He would wish his child to know what each side had to say, and not to be a blind partisan. Why should we not deal with the children of the State as we should deal with our own children? . . .

There would further be this great advantage in the use of such a catechism. It would go far to solve the difficulty connected with the proposed abolition of tests. For it could be used with perfect good faith by any serious and reverent person, whether Churchman or Nonconformist.

As to the preparation of it, I am persuaded there would be no trouble, if the task were approached in a spirit of true Christian wisdom and tolerance.

No doubt we should like it better if all devout and intelligent men believed as we do on the subject of the Church and Sacra-

ments. But we know that there is not agreement as to the proper interpretation of the Divine Mind and Will on these points. That is the fact, and it is worse than useless to try to conceal it. It is better to be honest, even in dealing with a little child, and to tell him frankly how much—and happily it is very much—Christian people have in common, and wherein they differ.

I am, Sir,

Yours obediently,

H. ARNOLD THOMAS.

BRISTOL.

Nothing came of this suggestion at the time, but it remains worthy of careful consideration by all men of good will who seek a fair solution by consent.

Arnold Thomas rejoiced in the inheritance of the Free Churches, but he deprecated controversy by reference to events and quarrels long since passed away. "No Church is more firmly rooted than ours," he said, "in the venerable past. . . . We have a great and a noble heritage. But we cannot live upon the past." In his view the most effective answer to the claims of Catholicism is the exhibition of a living Church, manifesting a spirit that cannot be gainsaid but outside the Catholic fold: "Who would concern himself greatly with questions of pedigree or outward form or vestments or of a Real Presence in the consecrated wafer, when he knew and felt that the Lord of all was so near, was laying his own sacred hands upon the bowed heads of His servants, and moving within them by His Spirit? If those things were so, then surely there is nothing more that we need ask for. . . . For consider how much must follow where His Presence was realized. . . .

What anxiety there would be to bear each other's burdens when, looking up, we see His face and remember His law and that burden which He Himself bore for us ! How impossible all bad feeling would be ; how all our bickerings would be hushed into silence, when we knew that every angry or cruel word must be spoken in His hearing ! And what care there would be, what a passion in our hearts for the glory of His Name and for the spread of His cause, when it has become a matter of the deepest spiritual consciousness that the Captain of our salvation is truly in the midst of us ! ”

“ Congregationalism,” he once said, “ is not a pretty word, and, as a lady said coming away from a rather unsatisfactory Union meeting, not a pretty denomination ; but *there is a principle behind it.*” In some ways he became a stronger Congregationalist as years went on. “ Perhaps in younger days,” he said, “ we were content with a religion that was interesting or beautiful in its outward form, a religion that suited our taste or our convenience, that was capable of being expressed in an artistic form ; but as we become older and life becomes a more serious matter to us, we cease to be content with beautiful fancies and noble forms of expression. We want to get at the facts. We want to know where we are. We want a religion that we can rely upon, a religion that is true.”

Arnold Thomas's loyalty to the Congregational principle never blinded him to the defects of his own denomination, nor to the excellencies of others. He most earnestly desired the drawing together of the Church of England and the Free Churches

if it could be in truth as well as in love, and he was prepared to go as far as possible to meet the Church of England. With regard to the Lambeth appeal he said : " The spirit of the Bishops' appeal leaves nothing to be desired, and should have the honest and sympathetic consideration of all whom it concerns. I believe much may come of it if the same spirit continues to prevail. I have never seen any essential difference between Episcopacy ' exercised in a representative and constitutional manner ' and the kind of Episcopacy which is commonly exercised, under other names, in most religious communions to-day. I should not feel much difficulty, therefore, on this score. Nor do I think our ministers need hesitate to accept a ' form of commission or recognition ' which would commend their ministry to Anglican congregations. As to ordination, much depends on the meaning to be attached to the word. If it means only authority to minister in the Anglican Communion, no Free Church minister need scruple to accept it. But if its meaning must be defined by the terms of the present Ordination Service, I do not see any hope of its being generally accepted. I venture to think, therefore, that some modification of the existing service will be needed or an alternative service, to be used in the case of those who are accredited ministers in other communions."

He thought that the time was ripe for a reconsideration of the whole ecclesiastical position by the nation as a whole ; he did not believe that the Anglican Church of to-day would welcome or tolerate such an event as the ejection of 1662; nor the virtual

ejection of the Methodist Movement; those were mistakes in the past and were now remediable, if Christian men of good will could but get together. Therefore in a letter to *The Times*, dated April 14, 1917, he proposed the summoning of a new "Savoy Conference," perhaps not very happily so called. He suggested that Parliament should invite representatives of the Christian life of the nation to consult together as to the possibility of a new Prayer Book, and that, if any agreement could be come to, it should place all cathedrals and parish churches at the disposal of those who were prepared to accept it. This proposal awakened very little response, and its importance would seem to lie rather in its testimony to Arnold Thomas's sense that the Protestants of England were one at heart and that a great Protestant National Church was possible and desirable.

Amongst some notes obviously made about this time he has left a draft sketch of those changes which in his view would be essential to comprehension; these notes, to the best of my knowledge, were never made public, either because of the very poor response to his letter or because he felt he had not given quite enough consideration to the question. It may be serviceable, however, to reproduce them here as indicating in a tentative way the kind of terms upon which, as it seemed to a true Free Churchman who ardently desired unity, a comprehensive national Church could now be constituted. The notes are headed "Some Things Essential to Comprehension"; they are six in number; first, Prayer Book revision, including

a remodelling of the Creeds ; second, freedom such as existed prior to 1662 ; third, modifications in the service to be approved by the congregation as represented by the churchwardens and by the bishop—the people to be thus delivered from the tyranny of the minister ; fourth, a great increase in the number of bishops—the number forty-two is given ; fifth, both bishops and clergy to be chosen by a small council, like the council of a public school or a board of directors or the committee of a hospital ; sixth, these councils to be popularly elected. It is perhaps not to be expected that the present Church of England as a whole could be found willing to discuss reunion on these terms, but if ever the tension between the two parties in the Church of England should become intolerable, these tentative suggestions might well be taken as a basis for discussion with a view to a truly comprehensive Protestant Church in England.

Arnold Thomas was not unduly cast down by the rejection of his proposal of a new “ Savoy Conference.” He sought every possible opportunity of “ cordializing ” with the Church of England. At a dinner of the Rotary Club, when crackers had been pulled and paper caps were being worn, he whimsically insisted on an exchange of caps with Dean Burroughs as a first step to that interchange of pulpits which at the moment seemed impossible ! Some of his happiest hours were spent at meetings of a little private society in Bristol called the “ Hibbert,” of which he was the originator and the inspiration ; it was a little company of ministers and laymen drawn from the Anglican and Free Churches

who met for occasional discussions of religious and social questions. He was in his element at these gatherings, free, shrewd and humorous, sceptical as always, non-committal on obscure doctrines, but overshadowing all the meeting with a genial charity and a profound religion and simple piety.

Co-operation in social work was comparatively easy; on November 27, 1917, he wrote: "The Bishop and I are inviting sixty parsons of all sorts to confer on Capital and Labour with some employers and Labour people"; but he was not content with this alone. One of the very earliest contributions to the Cathedral Renovation Fund, which was launched in 1922, was a guinea from Arnold Thomas; he was also a member of the General Committee in charge of the fund. In 1918 the Dean asked him to offer the "consecration" prayer in the cathedral in the thanksgiving service for the Armistice. It was a very memorable occasion; the cathedral, that cathedral which, as it is pleasant to reflect, had been saved from fire by the Dissenters during the riots of 1831, was packed—many could not obtain admittance—and Arnold Thomas led the people's prayers in his own beautiful way and after the unprescribed forms to which he was accustomed. Thirty-three of the clergy, in loyalty to their principles, sent an indignant protest to the Bishop about this, but 108 clergy signed a letter expressing full satisfaction with what had been done.

In the summer of 1922 he asked the Dean whether the Bristol Missionary Society, which was founded in 1812 with a service at St. Mary Redcliff, but which has since lost connection with the Church

of England, might for once hold its annual service in the cathedral. He suggested that the Bishop or the Dean should preach, and that the whole service should be in the hands of the cathedral authorities. The suggestion was welcomed, and there was a great congregation of Nonconformists in the cathedral, which Arnold Thomas still regarded as the mother church of his native city ; the Dean preached, and Arnold Thomas led the people's prayers.

On Christmas Eve of 1922 he gave an address in the cathedral after evensong on "The Witness of Congregationalism."¹ He was glad, and more than glad, to accept an invitation of this kind, though in his lifetime it seemed hardly possible that a return visit from the other side should be made. But when he died the Bishop of Bristol attended his funeral at Highbury Chapel ; he spoke a few words out of a full heart, but his presence was more eloquent than any words.

¹ See *infra*, pp. 155.

VI.—LAST DAYS

THERE is very much more that might be said of Arnold Thomas if this were the place to write his biography or the history of Highbury ; his life was full of interest and useful service, but above all he was, like Mr. Waikle of Gowanry in John Galt's story, " a quiet hewer out of the image of holiness in the heart." It was this that he cared most about, that men should be good, that they should be religious. The aspirations of his life were summed up in the hymn he wrote :—

Brother, who on Thy heart did'st bear
The burden of our shame and sin,
And stoapest ever still to share
The fight without, the fear within ;

Whose patience cannot know defeat,
Whose pity will not be denied,
Whose loving-kindness is so sweet,
Whose tender mercies are so wide.

O Brother Man, for this we pray,
Thou Brother Man and sovereign Lord,
That we Thy brethren, day by day,
May follow Thee and keep Thy word ;

That we may care, as Thou hast cared,
For sick and lame and maimed and blind,
And freely share, as Thou hast shared,
In all the woe of all mankind ;

That ours may be the holy task
To help and bless, to heal and save ;
This is the privilege we ask,
And this the happiness we crave.

So in Thy mercy make us wise,
And lead us in the paths of love
Until, at last, our wondering eyes
Look on Thy glorious face above.

He did not long outlive his resignation of the pastorate at Highbury ; his work was done. On January 3, 1924, he wrote : " I am afraid the future with me is very uncertain. I have been troubled with breathlessness for some time, and a fortnight ago Symes told me it was cardiac asthma." On March 4th he wrote with his usual humour : " Thank you for your kind inquiries. I am afraid I am like the Prince of Wales in the poem :

From day to day the saddening message came—
' He is no better : he is much the same.'"

But he got worse rapidly. When the end was very near, he sent for the Dean. Dr. Burroughs writes : " I was presiding at a session of our School of Theology for Clergy when a message reached me that his sister had come to ask me to go at once and see him, as he had expressed a wish to see me several times. When I arrived I found him very weak but quite conscious, and he recognized me at once. . . . He explained, though with difficulty, that he had always felt an affection for the cathedral and wished me as its present Head to come and pray with him. What he wanted was that I should

repeat the General Confession and Absolution in the Church of England Office for Morning Prayer, to which I suggested adding the Lord's Prayer and a Collect which touched on the nearness of the two worlds. When I had done this I asked him to end by giving me his Blessing, which he did in most moving and affectionate terms." The Dean adds that he could not help thinking of the contrast between spiritual facts and some ecclesiastical theories.

The face of death was too familiar to be terrible to Arnold Thomas, but he suffered much from weakness and extreme discomfort at the end. His memory became sometimes clouded, and periods of depression were inevitable under such circumstances, but he was for the most part marvellously cheerful, and could nearly always produce some little joke, often at his own expense. During the last few days and nights of his life he was constantly attended and supported by Mr. Ronald Gunn, who was to him always as a son, and who was at his side when on the morning of June 28, 1924, he passed away to that world "where live the dead, and only Death shall die."

Anything like a formal biography would be distasteful to him, but, as he himself said of Anselm, "there have not been too many saints in this sad world, and we cannot afford to forget or neglect any-one of the holy fellowship." He was indeed one of those

Heirs of more than royal race,
Framed by Heaven's peculiar grace,
God's own work on earth to do.

COLLECTED PAPERS AND
ADDRESSES

I.—ON BEING GOOD ¹

THE dying counsels of Sir Walter Scott have long since become public property. His biographer tells us that he found him a few days before the end “entirely himself, though in the last extremity of feebleness. His eye was clear and calm. Every trace of the wild fire of delirium was extinguished.” And he said, “Lockhart, I may have but a few minutes to speak to you. My dear, be a good man ; be virtuous ; be religious ; be a good man ; nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here.” There is not one of us, I am sure, who will not accept with solemn acquiescence the testimony contained in these affecting farewell words. We, who have seen so many tired travellers lying there, by the river brink, with the toil and trouble of the pilgrimage all behind them, and waiting till the call comes to pass over to the other side—we know well that there is nothing, then, that seems to be of much importance, in comparison with goodness and piety. Sir Walter was absolutely in the right.

But it is not only because of the comfort they may bring when a man is broken down, and worn out, that goodness and religion are of such great

¹ An address delivered from the chair of the Congregational Union of England and Wales on May 13, 1899.

value. They are always the best things. "Ah, sir," said an old woman, who had been speaking to me once with a quivering lip of sad things that she had known in her long experience of life, "ah, sir, it is good to be good." And I felt that she had succeeded in packing into a small parcel a great deal of sound philosophy. It is good to be good. And there is nothing better. To be good, and religious, is to have picked up the pearl of great price. It is to have learned the great secret. It is to have found the kingdom of God. It is everything.

And it is in the light of their effect upon goodness and religion, of their bearing on character, that the value of all other things is to be estimated. We are accustomed to spend a considerable amount of time, and often not a little emotion, in discussing with much animation, and apparently little sense of fatigue, a variety of matters which we reckon to be of importance. We talk about the Church, for instance, and write weighty treatises and deliver impressive lectures on its history and constitution. We indulge in prolonged conferences on questions of polity, or principle, or method. We inquire into the proper interpretation of Christian doctrine. We argue about the Sacraments. And these discussions and investigations are no doubt highly interesting and profitable. I have not a single word to say against them. But is it not possible that in the eagerness with which we carry on our deliberations on such subjects there may be a little danger of our forgetting that all these things are but means to that which is of greater value than themselves?

Richard Baxter tells us how in his later years he came to value all things according to their use and ends. But how easy it is, at least before age comes and brings with it the philosophic mind, to forget the use and ends of many things which receive a large share of our attention. There is the Church. Controversies about the Church are interminable. But what is the Church? What is the use and end of it? We may easily go wrong here. The Church is not a pretty plaything for the amusement of people with time on their hands. Nor is it an ornament to be decked out and admired. Nor a venerable relic to be jealously preserved. Nor an idol to be worshipped. Nor an attractive field for those who have a fancy for antiquarian research. Nor an institution to be maintained for the glory of those who hold office in it. The Church is none of these things. It is an instrument for purifying and perfecting human souls. It is a nursery and a school for the saints. Like the Sabbath, it was made for man. And the true test of its worth is the measure in which it serves to make men good and to make them religious. What sort of characters is it forming? That is the point. I was told lately in Westmorland that when the Prince of Wales was at Grasmere, as a little boy, he one day amused himself by chasing some sheep. The good woman who owned the sheep pursued him with a stick and was about to proceed to extremities. The Prince's tutor, however, interposed and asked her if she knew whose son it was that she was proposing to deal with. "I know nought, and I care nought," she replied, "but he is a badly brought

up bairn of somebody's." Not altogether an unreasonable answer, I think. And it is with mother Churches as with parents after the flesh. It is vain to speak of ancient birth or intrinsic dignity. What are the bairns like that the Church is bringing up? Are they all coming through its influence, and training, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ? That is what we want to know. And so of the doctrines, and sacraments, of the Church, may it not be said that their essential purpose is a practical one? It is one of the many complaints that are made of the men of the eighteenth century, that "every one who had anything to say on sacred subjects, drilled it into an army of arguments against a supposed objector. Christianity appeared made for nothing else but to be proved. What use to make of it when proved was not much thought about. The only quality in Scripture which was dwelt on was its credibility." But perhaps even we of the nineteenth century are not wholly free from reproach in this matter. Even we are sometimes a little slow to consider what is the use, and end, of Christian doctrine. Yet that is surely the chief thing to be considered. Why did Christ speak to the disciples about the Spirit who should come? Not that there might be a doctrine of the Holy Ghost. Certainly not that the disciples might engage in vain wranglings on the subject of the personality, or the procession, of the Holy Ghost. But rather that they might know that they were not to be left in the world as orphans, and that they might receive the Spirit when He came, and rejoice in all His gracious gifts

and consolations. Or again, why did Christ die? That He might provide material for Divinity lectures, or themes for theological debate? No, but that He might bring us to God, that He might make us religious.

He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good.

It was that that He cared about so much. I do not think He would have endured the Cross in order to create a philosophy of redemption. It would not have been worth while. But it was worth while, even to die, to make us good. So He thought at least, though to us perhaps the thing may not seem to be of quite so much importance. And the Sacraments. Why on that last night that He spent with His friends did He break bread and give it to them, and pour out the cup? And why did He say that the bread was His body, and that the wine was His blood? Do you think it was His purpose to propound a riddle for metaphysicians? Do you think He was inviting us to exercise our ingenuity on the question, dear to school-men, of the relation between substance and accidents? Was He concerned to multiply mysteries? I think not. Surely His purpose rather was that we might remember His dying love, and that we might walk in love even as He loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour. Is not that the true use and end of the Holy Supper? Bacon complains of the Puritans of his day that they "tossed up and down the bread of life and

broke it not." If that was a just accusation, let us in this respect be wiser than they. That heavenly bread is to be eaten, in all humility and love, and to be broken for all souls that are hungry, not tossed about.

It is well, then, not to forget that the great end of our institutions, principles, politics, methods, is goodness and religion ; and it ought not to be an unfruitful inquiry whether, or in what ways, or to what extent, the life and work of our Churches are tending to further these ends. What is the bearing of our position as Nonconformists, of our traditional practices, our customs, the nature and manner of our work, on character ? How are our life, and our labours, helping us, and helping others, to be good, to be religious ?

In dealing with this question, I wish to concern myself just now only with the relation in which we stand to goodness, as distinguished from religion. It may, of course, be argued that goodness and religion are essentially one—that you cannot be truly good without being, in some sense, religious also ; and, on the other hand, that your religion cannot be worth anything unless it be associated with goodness. That may fairly be argued. And it may be admitted that, in the last analysis, religion is goodness, and goodness is religion. But one need not be always reducing everything to the last analysis. Practically, we do distinguish, both in speech and in thought, between the good man and the religious man. Of one you say, " He is a fine character, but unhappily he has no religion " ; and of another, " He is, no doubt, sincerely religious, but his morality

is gravely defective." You recognize, thus, a distinction.

My business to-day, then, is with goodness. I hope I may be able to say something of religion on another occasion.

Now, it is possible that we may feel able to enter on the inquiry as to the relation of our Churches to ethical questions with some degree of complacency. Here, at least, we may claim that our record is clear. Have we not always been conspicuous for the interest we have taken in the fundamental moralities? Have we not been, in some special sense, the trustees of the Puritan traditions? Has not the Nonconformist Conscience become proverbial? We have had our infirmities, no doubt, but if anything is to be said in our favour, it must be this, that we have cared more for justice, honour, purity, truth, than for any kind of outward show, or worldly glory, or personal comfort. So much we may surely claim. Well, I think we may justly say so much without exposing ourselves to any charge of undue self-glorification. It is easy to raise a laugh at the Nonconformist Conscience. To some minds anything pertaining to Nonconformity appears to be chiefly matter for amusement. But let the stupid world make merry as it will, I rejoice in the Nonconformist Conscience, and am deeply thankful for it.

It is, however, good for us to blend our self-approbation with an element of self-scrutiny. And I venture to ask whether our concern for character, and conduct, may not wisely be carried farther than the point at which the Nonconformist Conscience

has been commonly exercised? There are two questions which seem to be worth considering.

First, there is the question whether while protesting against the more gross and palpable vices, we have always cared quite so much as we might have cared for the less obvious application of those great moral principles, about which, when stated in general terms, we are all agreed. I may be allowed to suggest two or three possible instances. The late Professor Seeley was accustomed to complain in strong terms—and he was not a man who spoke at random—of an immorality, as he thought it should be called, of which his own profession, as a teacher, was constantly furnishing him with examples. This immorality was the habit common to many fathers of delegating altogether to others the education of their children. He considered that the “immediate consequences of this kind of neglect were sometimes startling, and the less direct and obvious consequences beyond calculation. I know,” he says, “of scarcely any other cause from which the community suffers so much.” And he assumes that the neglect is not “from any indifference on the part of parents to the welfare of their children, or from any deliberate contempt of moral obligation, but simply because this particular duty has never been pointed out to them.” That opinion of a shrewd observer may, I think, be worth our attention. It may be that here is an application of moral principle of which enough has not been made in our Churches, and that if there had been among us a livelier sense of parental responsibility, we should have seen less of what it has sometimes grieved us to the heart to

see in the sons and daughters of good men. The point is worth raising also whether, in urging upon parents the personal care of their children in regard to the things of the mind, and of the spirit, we may not secure the best guarantee for the protection of the children from certain influences in our schools, elementary or otherwise, which we cannot but regard as perilous. It is only a limited amount of sympathy we can feel with a father who complains of what his child is taught at school, if he himself takes no trouble whatever to teach him what he believes to be true and important. By all means, let us fight against everything that seems to be unfair in our educational system, but let us also plead with every parent to care for the mind and soul of his own child.

This is only one instance of a possible dulness of the denominational conscience. It is not difficult to suggest others. We all agree that it is incumbent on Christian people to consider the poor. But is there not need first to learn for oneself and then to explain to others how the poor may be effectually helped? Is it no part of our duty to point to the evil that is wrought from want of thought, as well as to the evil that is wrought through want of heart? It is a very real grief and discouragement to many who have lived among the poor, and have come to understand their ways, and have won their confidence, to note what lasting mischief is done by much well-meant but ill-considered charity. The testimony of such persons is surely entitled to some consideration. It is a serious thing, even though you should have no evil intention, to be hurting the

very soul of your brother by a mode of treatment which the humane impulse of the moment may suggest, but which is almost certain to make an honourable and self-respecting life more difficult to him. I know this is not exactly a popular line of remark, and that I may be charged with holding a brief for those much-abused people of the Charity Organization Society. But it is often the unpopular view which is best worth studying, and I know you will let me ask whether we have always quite sufficiently realized that a man's duty to his neighbour requires that the help given to him should be genuine help and not a means of encouraging habits of idleness, or intemperance, or unmanly dependence on others.

And then there are the lower animals. Those who have been concerned to inquire into the sorrows of these dumb creatures, that are unable to plead their own cause, have sometimes been heard to speak with something stronger than regret, with indignation and wonder, at what they have felt to be the callousness of Christian men and religious teachers. And I have a fear that the complaint is not entirely without foundation. Perhaps some of us have been a little to blame. And perhaps it would not be altogether amiss if we were, now and then, to turn aside from those learned disquisitions which interest our hearers so much, in order to say something of that righteousness which inclines a man to be merciful to his beast. "The sheik Stanley is a good man," said his Arab servant of Dean Stanley; "the horses and camels love him." It was not a bad indication of goodness. And we may doubt

whether we are quite good people if we have never cared to do anything that should win the gratitude and affection of these creatures which often love us so truly, and serve us so patiently and so well.

A word may perhaps also be said on our relation to questions of public policy, whether domestic or foreign. On such questions we may think the Nonconformist Conscience has not been slow to make itself heard. And indeed on some occasions it has spoken and with marked effect. But there may be a doubt whether a little more vigilance in some directions would not be beneficial. Most Governments require looking after, more or less closely. And it is the duty of the Church to know what is being done in the name of the people. Otherwise we may be led astray before we know what is happening. That there is some danger in this direction can scarcely be doubted. The Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Cambridge, Mr. Henry Sidgwick, has lately been calling attention to the fact that the "approval of breaches of morality, for patriotic ends, is now being formulated, especially in Germany, into a system, and deliberately applied by eminent students of history and political science, to the acts of statesmen in all ages and countries." And he quotes an address by the Chancellor of a famous German University in which the author declares that the "maintenance of the State justifies every sacrifice, and is superior to every moral rule." Which may be a Gospel according to Caiaphas, but is not a morality of a very high order. We, I am sure, are not prepared to go so far. But when we bear in mind how, more than once, in recent

years, great moral considerations have been cynically set aside when British interests, or the material interests of Great Britain, which are not at all the same thing, have seemed to require the sacrifice, we may surely join with Mr. Sidgwick in calling for the "morally emancipated statesman," of whatever party, "who, when circumstances drive him to cruelty, rapacity, breach of faith, or falsehood, will not waver and whine about the painful necessity, but with simple decision, unhampered by scruples, will take the course that leads straightest to the next stage of the everlasting progress."

But there is a second way in which our concern for moral character may be carried farther than the point at which the Nonconformist Conscience ceases to be heard. Our witness is to be for goodness, but what are we to understand by goodness? To be good is to tell no lies, to be honest, temperate, chaste, to lead an upright, decent, useful life. But is that all? Is the spirit nothing? Are we not to care for the motive, the disposition, the quality, and manner of our actions, as well as the actions themselves? Are there no delicacies, no nobilities, no chivalries, no generousities, no heroisms to be included in our conception, and definition, of goodness? Is that a good man who is only a righteous man, in the sense of doing what strict honesty requires? "Peradventure for a good man, some would even dare to die." Does that mean that one could scarcely be expected to die for a man who was indeed righteous, but nothing more? It may be doubted whether that is sound exegesis. But there is surely a goodness which goes beyond bare

righteousness. There is the goodness which we call by the beautiful name of grace. That neighbour of yours is a man for whom you feel very great respect. Of course you respect him. Everyone respects him. He is in such an eminent degree respectable. A man of such sterling worth. A model of virtue. A pillar of society. A righteous man, if ever there was one. But if you were invited to go to the stake for him, why, you might do it, but you would not do it cheerfully. Even to live next door to him is something of a discipline. The fact is, he is not a charming person. He is not a gentleman, to put it plainly. That is a significant name, still, however it may be "defamed by every charlatan, and soiled with all ignoble use." It suggests qualities that may be found as readily in the cottage as in the palace. And they are qualities by which we shall all be adorned when God has completed His work in us, and we stand perfect in Christ Jesus. The rag which may serve as protection from the rough weather we meet with in this world, will not do as a wedding garment to wear at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The King's sons and daughters must be all glorious within. God cannot let us be for ever disfigured by those little infirmities, as we are pleased to call them, those sullen tempers, those sharp angles, which make our company so uncomfortable to our neighbours, those minor defects of which we are aware, and of which our friends are, perhaps, still better aware, all that "general disagreeableness of good people," as George Macdonald calls it. God cannot put up with these blemishes for ever. We think they do

not matter. But they do matter. And they will have to go, every one of them, sooner or later. And better sooner than later. And the Church of Christ, if she would fulfil all her duty, must be concerned with all such graces of character, as well as with those solid elements which may seem to be more useful or necessary. It is good to make beautiful our buildings and our services. No one need quarrel with the improvements that are taking place in these directions. But it is far more essential to see to it that all those who name the Holy Name are ever growing in all that is lovely, and fair, and of good report.

But now, assuming the importance of these great moral ends, the question arises, By what means are they to be promoted? And it seems natural to ask, first, What may be done by teaching?—in the pulpit or elsewhere. To speak first of the pulpit. Professor Seeley complained bitterly that there was a lack of definite moral teaching in the pulpit. I do not know how far there may be ground for that complaint in regard to our pulpits, and I will not hazard a conjecture. But we may claim that it is a part of the preacher's business to explain what goodness is, in its varied applications to life, as well as to furnish motive power for the practice of it. Do you take alarm at that notion? Do you say that you do not want to have back again the moral essay, of which our fathers grew so weary, and in which they found so little spiritual nutriment? I am not sure, however, that the reaction against the moral essay was not sometimes carried a little too far. In any case, the true objection to it was not,

I imagine, on account of what it contained, but on account of what it did not contain. It was not unprofitable because of the morality which was in it, but because of its lack of warmth, and life, and practical purpose. It was too abstract, too academic. But moral questions need not be dealt with in that spirit. You may put as much feeling, as much conviction, as much passion, into your treatment of such questions as into the discussion of any points of pure doctrine. And I cannot think the preacher is doing all his duty if he does not speak of what his conscience and reason tell him to be right, and if he does not speak with special emphasis of such things as are not less right and less essential to the good and virtuous life, because they are less obviously right than others, in regard to which the requirements of the moral law are universally acknowledged. I suppose we all admit the necessity of holiness. Some who are not favourable to moral sermons, are yet to be found stealing, at times, to holiness meetings. And one is glad that they should be there. But holiness is not goodness of one special quality, or in one special direction. Holiness means, or ought to mean, nothing less than perfection of character. To be holy, therefore, in the deepest sense, we must not only have the disposition to serve our neighbours, but know how to serve them wisely and effectually. He only can be perfectly good who is wise concerning that which is good. That is, perhaps, enough to say about the pulpit.

A word about the teaching in our Sunday schools. I should like to put the question whether, having

regard to the little time, comparatively speaking, that the teacher has at his disposal, it may not be a wise thing to give attention chiefly to such truths or principles as may tend directly to mould and develop the character. Many parts of the Bible are taken up and explained, I believe, in the classroom, the discussion of which, though no doubt extremely interesting, is often also extremely difficult. Questions arise of criticism, of interpretation, which the teacher may often feel that he cannot deal with quite honestly and adequately, partly from want of the special learning required to understand such questions, and partly from a natural unwillingness to put ideas into the minds of his scholars, which their parents might not approve, or which might not be in harmony with the teaching commonly given in the Church with which the school is connected. This is, I know, a serious problem with some of our teachers, and it is likely that some who are admirably fitted in many ways to be teachers are hindered from a sense of its difficulty. They do not know what they ought to say to the children on this point or on that, which is perplexing to their own minds. Now is it not a question worth discussing whether it would not be wise to give to teachers considerable freedom in the choice of subjects? and whether it would not be well for the teachers to use this freedom in choosing such subjects as they could treat with sympathy and conviction, and such subjects as promise to yield material for the building up of the characters of those entrusted to their care, in beauty and strength.

I am tempted to make also a brief reference here

to our day schools, especially to our great secondary schools, and to the influence which they exert. Think for a moment of our boys. There may be exceptions, but I should think the average schoolboy is not generally very deeply interested in the sermons which he hears on Sundays. That may be the fault of the sermons. No doubt it is in part; but not altogether. It seems to be a peculiarity of boy nature not to take very kindly to sermons. But if the sermon does not always count for much, the traditions and customs of his school, the moral atmosphere he breathes there, the type of character, the code of honour which the school respects—these things count for a great deal. That is a fact to be reckoned with. And we do a very foolish and perilous thing if we think only of the schools which are clever in winning scholarships, or most attractive to fashionable and wealthy people, and take no pains to inquire where the noblest work is being done in respect of the making of the manhood of the future.

And now I come to a matter that is somewhat more personal and delicate. I want to speak for a little, frankly and seriously, not about what we teach, but about what we are, or what we are not, as the case may be—about ourselves. If we want to make the world better, the thing is for us to be good ourselves. It is very well to preach. But the best sermon is the man. He must be a gospel who would preach the Gospel. We hammer away at the Pauline Epistles. But what is God saying by our own lives to the Churches and to the world? To do good, we must be good. And that

is so extraordinarily difficult. "Any fool," a modern novelist makes one of her characters say, "any fool can be clever." But to be good! That is the problem of problems, the most perplexing, the most intricate—one may feel sometimes the most hopeless—that can engage our minds. I think it is an especially hard matter for ministers to be good. That is, perhaps, not the common view. "It is terribly hard for us," those who are not ministers may say, "for us who are struggling out here, amid all the wickedness and temptations of the world. There is some credit in our being even moderately good. But you ministers, shut up as you are in your studies, with your Bibles, and your commentaries, and your books of devotion, it ought to be easy for you to be good." Easy! God help us, but it is desperately hard. They say the stage is beset with moral perils. And I can believe it. But what shall we say of the pulpit? Are there any perils more insidious, more deadly, than those which encompass the man whose work lies there? It is not, I suppose, a difficult thing for the average minister to keep from shameful vices. It may take no great effort to be good, as many of the Pharisees were good. But that is not quite the kind of goodness that our Master requires. And who can be good in those highest ways? There can be no goodness without reality, and how hard a matter it is to be real, to be sincere, for those who have to be constantly talking, whatever their mood may be, about sacred things! How hard to keep the inward life ever in accord with the spoken message! How easy to degenerate into a

performer, to take to uttering fine things, the truth of which one does not deeply feel, or more than half believe ! There is another horrible temptation, the temptation to turn religion to account, for the furtherance of one's own private ends. Heine said that "the clergy feared God less than other men. They used Him for their own purposes." To think that it is possible to lie open to the reproach conveyed by those biting words ! To think that we are in any danger of utilising things which are most tragic, most awful, most glorious, the most solemn mysteries of the faith, the sinfulness of sin, the terrors of the Lord, Gethsemane and Calvary, the Cross and Passion, the agony and bloody sweat of the Redeemer—that we should be in danger of utilizing such things as these as promising material for the construction of our rhetorical masterpieces ! And is there no such danger besetting us ? Is it easy to put every thought of one's own glory firmly on one side ? Then I take it one of our chief duties as Christian men is to be patient and forbearing. And what an effort the fulfilment of that primary duty sometimes costs us ! I have known ministers who have had many bitter experiences, and who must have needed no small measure of grace in order to keep the New Commandment. And if there are some amongst us who are sorely tried and humiliated, there are also some who are so unfortunate as to succeed, or at least to become popular. They attract congregations. Friends say kind things to them. They are made much of. And then what happens ? We know what their danger is. They are in danger of becoming spoiled.

Spoiled ! It is a word quickly spoken. But what a sad piece of work, what a tragedy it is, when a good man is spoiled ! You would be grieved if some famous work of art in your possession were to be spoiled. You do not like your new carpet to be spoiled by the bright rays of the morning sun. But how much better is a man than a carpet ? I cannot wonder that General Gordon hated to be praised. We love praise so much that we may well hate it. It is a thing to be afraid of. It is so much easier to think of the ready smiles of complaisant friends than of the Judgment Seat of Christ, before which we must appear ; so much more gratifying an employment to feed our vanity with complimentary remarks which somebody is understood to have made about us, or pleasant paragraphs that our eyes light upon in the newspapers, than to bring our work and ourselves into the holy presence of God, that He may search us, and try our hearts, and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. Even those who love us best may be cruel in their kindness, and may hurt us irreparably by their well-meant eulogies.

Remember, also, how often those very peculiarities of temperament which make a man a preacher, and account for his popularity, are likely to expose him to grave danger in moments of reaction from the excitement of public work. That which is eloquence, or unction, in the pulpit, may take the form of nervous irritability when the pulpit work is done. And so the orator, whom his delighted hearers take to be almost a saint, may be little better than a brute to his much-enduring wife, and a terror

to his children. And those who know how the matter stands will say that it would be well to reserve a little of that sentiment which is apt to run to waste in the sermon, for the use and comfort of those who have the first claim upon the preacher's love and care. Oh ! it is hard, hard work to be what we would wish to be ; and it cannot be thought surprising if the preacher by profession should sometimes feel that it would be well if he could throw up his office, and spend the remainder of his days in the humblest manual toil. Anything, anything to be away from that place of peril and temptation, in which it is so hard to keep the soul humble, and clean, and true ! Such a thought, however, is itself a temptation. The place of peril is also a place of opportunity. Where there is much to lose, there is much to gain. " Though Christian had the hard hap to meet with Apollyon in the valley of humiliation, and to enter with him a brisk encounter, yet I must tell you," says Mr. Greatheart, " that in former times men have met with angels here, have found pearls here, and have in this place found the words of life." That holds good of every place, and every occasion of spiritual trial. And, indeed, though we meet with Apollyon, and suffer from his fiery darts, or his subtle wiles, yet by that very suffering one may be made the more holy and perfect. We have therefore no right to complain, while a cowardly retreat would be nothing less than disgraceful.

And here I should like to say a word, if I may, about the women of our Churches, and their difficulties and opportunities. It is frequently not

without some cost that a man stands by his Nonconformist principles. He has often to suffer in feeling, if not in other ways. But if it is difficult for a man, it is generally much more difficult for a woman, and especially for an educated and accomplished woman. There are not many professions that are not open to men, and in which they may not hope to succeed, if they are diligent and capable, whether they are Churchmen or Nonconformists. But in the professions to which women are chiefly attracted, notably the teaching profession, it often makes all the difference whether the candidate is a Churchwoman or not. There is many a tempting door which is closed against her if she declares herself to be a Dissenter, and most of us know of hearts that have been made heavy by such rejections and refusals. But this is not all. For obvious reasons the question of social esteem usually matters much more to a woman than it does to a man. It counts for little on the Exchange or at the Bar what Church you belong to. But sometimes it is made to count for a great deal in the drawing-room. It is the woman, therefore, who feels the more acutely the disadvantage of being connected with a Church which the world of fashion is not pleased to regard with approval. And this is all the harder because it may be assumed that by nature she is more susceptible to any kind of social affront than the man is, as well as more quick to discern those signs and tokens by which the disapprobation of society is often so subtly but so effectually conveyed. And when it is remembered also that she is often sensible in a peculiar degree to the fascination of many of

those features in worship and ritual, which are usually more conspicuous in other communities than in our own, to all, I mean, that appeals to the æsthetic instincts, to one's feeling for what is beautiful, stately, mystical—when we consider these things, we can realize how much it may cost the woman who is by conviction a Nonconformist to be loyal to her conscience ; and how hard it must sometimes be for her to bear with unruffled patience what we know she has to bear. But here, too, there are compensations. Here, too, the loss may turn to noblest gain, and the trouble reveal itself as finest opportunity. For what women are there who so entirely command our admiration and our love as those who, in loyalty to truth and conscience, have been willing to suffer obloquy and pain ? And what charm is to be compared to the charm of that gentleness which will not be embittered by any slight, and retains its rare quality even in the valley of humiliation ? After all, it is not always those upon whom society smiles, and who have in this world an easy and pleasant time, who gain most for themselves, and do the most for others. It was a hard thing for the Apostles to be treated as the offscouring of all things, but that way of honour and duty was for them also the way of power. It was the way by which they passed to their thrones. And, indeed, it was even so with our Lord Himself. Do you think that He would ever have won the heart of the world if it had not been for the things that He suffered ? It is by the Cross, with all its shame and anguish, that He has conquered. And we may know, and may rejoice to know, that if we are content to join

Him there, without the camp, and to bear His reproach, the bitter cup will become to us also a cup of blessing. And so the things which seem to be altogether against us may turn to our salvation, and may be for the healing and comfort of others in the hour of their extremity.

There are just one or two points that may be touched upon in conclusion.

The question may be asked, whether it may not be an unhealthy and perilous thing to be often thinking of ourselves, and of what may be possible to us, in things moral and spiritual. It is a bad thing for a man to be thinking constantly of the salvation of his own soul. May it not be also a bad thing for him to be thinking constantly of his own growth in character? Is it not better to plunge with a fine recklessness into the work that has to be done, and leave one's character to God? Well, there is some reason in such a remonstrance. It is a perilous thing for a man to be making himself, in any way, the centre of his thoughts. The danger, however, is not likely to be very serious if we think of ourselves, not as belonging to ourselves, or existing for ourselves, but as belonging to God, and existing for the fulfilment of God's purposes. Moreover, if it is a perilous thing for us to be thinking much of our own growth in goodness, it is surely not a less perilous thing for us to be accepting ourselves, at the outset of our pilgrimage, or to be accepting the kindly estimate formed of us by our friends who are often so easily satisfied. We are likely, I think, to be in a healthier condition, to be more humble, more sensible of our need of Divine help, more forbearing

and tender towards others, if by our own ceaseless endeavours after holiness we are learning how difficult holiness is of attainment, than if we spend our days without any such hope, or aspiration, or struggle.

Again, it is worth noting that if it be for character that we are chiefly caring, and if we understand that all institutions and polities and methods are means to the perfecting of character, we are much more likely to live in peace with one another than if we concentrate our attention upon any institution or agencies. In regard to such matters there is, perhaps, not much probability of our ever being agreed. The fact is, that what helps one man does not help another. But if we are thinking rather of the end than of the means, we shall find no cause of quarrel with our neighbours in the fact that they and we are travelling by different paths. There is one great goal before us all, and with eyes uplifted to discern in the distance the shining gates of the city of God, we shall feel that we are one, in the hope of that great common inheritance and home of our souls. And remembering that the kingdom of God is not in the perfecting of any organization, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost we shall feel in most sacred fellowship with all men, whatever their methods or opinions may be, in whom that Divine Spirit is bearing His sweet and wholesome fruit.

And, last of all, let me remind you what comfort and inspiration there is for us all in such considerations as these. Many things are impossible for us. We know now that many of our early ambitions and hopes can never be fulfilled. Life has not been

what we had dreamed it might be. But here is one high privilege, here is one glorious achievement, of which no power on earth can defraud us, if we will be true to the voice within. It is difficult to be good. But, thank God, with Him all things are possible. And by His almighty help it lies within our reach to be honest, pure of heart, loving, gentle, magnanimous, brave, in all things like our Lord, which is the best that any child of man can ever hope for or desire.

II.—ON BEING RELIGIOUS ¹

IN the address which it was my privilege to deliver from this chair in the spring, I referred to goodness and religion as constituting the great ends which all our ecclesiastical institutions and methods are intended to serve. I spoke then more particularly on goodness, on the bearing of the life and work of our Churches on moral character. To-day I take up what is perhaps a more difficult task. I wish to ask you to bear with me while I try to say something on the great subject of religion. What is to be said of the religion of our time and of the relation of our numberless organizations and activities to the religious life? That is my theme.

I believe the question is one in regard to which many of us are not without anxieties. While unwilling to take too dark a view of things, we yet must own to a doubt whether religion counts for a great deal as a practical force in the life of our age. There is indeed much that may be urged with some plausibility on the other side. We may be reminded that there never was a time when men took more interest in religion, or talked more about it, or were more eager to push its claims, than they are at this hour. Debates in Parliament may be quoted as

¹ An address delivered from the chair of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, October 1899.

giving evidence of the widespread interest in the subject. "Think," it may be said, "of the correspondence and leading articles in the columns of the secular Press, of the public meetings that are being held, of the speeches that are delivered, of the books and pamphlets that are being published." Or our attention may be called to the extraordinary growth of ceremonial in the Anglican Church during the last half-century, and to the large sums that have been spent on the building or the decoration of churches, or the maintenance of an imposing ritual. Or we may be invited to mark the very significant movement towards federation which recent years have witnessed among the Free Churches, or the zeal with which the separate Denominations are raising great funds with the view of extending more widely the polity and principles to which they are attached. "All this," it will be urged, "does not look as though religion were a decaying force. Surely such facts should lead us to quite an opposite conclusion."

Well, I will not for a moment assume that religion is a decaying force. At the same time, I do not think we should be wise if we took it for granted that those movements to which reference has been made are necessarily indications of a genuine and vigorous religious life. Of course, much depends on what you understand by religion. St. Paul was struck by the extent to which the people of Athens seemed to be interested in religion. And yet their religion was not exactly what he meant by religion. And it is possible that he might feel in the same way about much of the religion which we find

abounding in our own time. There is, for instance, unquestionably, much more religious symbolism in public worship than there used to be. But what does this symbolism mean? It may mean that men are feeling more deeply on religious subjects than they were, that there is more spiritual hunger, more aspiration after God, and that they are anxious to give all possible expression to these deep feelings which have been awakened within them. That is what the prevailing symbolism may mean. Let us hope and let us believe that this is what it does mean, in many instances. But we ought not to forget that it may mean something quite different, that it may be not a new and more adequate way of coming into communion with God, but a substitute for God, a device for making amends for the loss of fellowship with Him and for appeasing those instincts which, though they are too easily satisfied, have not quite died out. "Ritualism itself," writes Mr. Goldwin Smith, "seems to betray the need of a new stimulus, and to be, in some measure, an æsthetic substitute for spiritual religion." Mr. Smith may be wrong in his opinion, as he is I think in a good many of his opinions. Still, it is by no means an impossible view to take. And if we are asked to listen to all the vehement discussions and contentions on religious matters which are raging around us, and the question is put to us whether they do not prove that men are caring a good deal nowadays about religion, however unfortunate in some instances their mode of showing their interest may be, why then we must reply that we know too much of human nature to suppose that the passion which men throw into their controversies

is any sure indication of their real concern for the truth or the principle which is being discussed. It is quite a common thing for a man to grow warm, and almost furious, if he is a person of combative temperament, in defending or attacking a position which he would consider to be of very little importance if he were perfectly calm. He fights in that desperate way because he has been infected by the party spirit, or because he has the fighting instinct, not because the thing for which he is contending is so very precious or sacred to him. "If," it has been said, "you want to see the true white heat of controversial passion, if you want to see men fling away the very thought of reconciliation, and close in internecine conflict, you should look at controversialists who do not differ at all, but who have adopted different words to express the same opinion." Nor, again, may we assume that the aggressive energy in our Churches is any certain evidence of religious life. It may be. In a measure we may justly and thankfully believe that it is. And yet many motives may be urging us to press forward, some of which can scarcely be said to be in the deepest sense religious, and may even appear to be unworthy of sincerely religious men. "Active men," says Dr. Mozley, "can be active almost about anything, and amongst other things about a religion in which they do not believe. They can throw themselves into public machinery and the bustle of crowds, when, if two were left together to make their confession of faith to each other, they would feel awkward."

It is instructive to recall the state of things in

Jerusalem in the days of Jesus. The land was full of religion then. The discussions that took place on religious subjects were of the most animated kind. Minute attention was paid to all points of ritual observance. There was astonishing zeal in making proselytes. And yet there was so little real religion that when Christ talked about heavenly things there was scarcely anyone who had any notion what He meant.

And this leads to the inquiry what real religion is. If to be religious does not mean building churches, and arranging for services, and engaging in theological disputes, what does it mean? The best answer to such a question is the answer which is found in our Lord's own words. Religion is the worship of the Father in spirit and truth. To be religious is to be in direct and personal relations with God. It is to be reconciled to Him, to be at least willing and anxious to be reconciled to Him. It is to be living as in His presence and as His child. It is personal faith in God, personal fellowship with God, a walking with God.

Now, that being our conception of religion, is it not a question worth some serious consideration whether it is a very great power in the world, or even in the Church? Mr. Ruskin said, in his strong way half a century ago, that "there never had been a generation of men, savage or civilized, who, taken as a body, so woefully fulfilled the words, 'having no hope and without God in the world,' as the modern civilized European races," and he declared that "a Red Indian or Otaheitan savage had more sense of a Divine existence around him, and govern-

ment over him, than the plurality of our refined Londoners and Parisians." Was that truly the case when he wrote? Are we sure that there would be no truth in such an indictment now that the century is closing? This is what a vigorous writer has somewhat recently been saying in one of our great newspapers: "We think we are tolerant," he says, "when we are only tepid. In the spiritual sphere, the relations of the sects have been improved exactly as the power of all religion has been impaired. The approaching end of the nineteenth century is a grave moment of transition well fitted for perplexed and even for troubled thought. What is passing, what coming, hardly may we know. We only know that there is a closing and an opening of volumes. What is to be the record of religion? . . . In every city of civilization, Sunday presents a subject for profound and ironic meditation. The majority stay away from church, not at all because they are hostile to religion, but because they have no belief. A large minority goes in the procession along the highways and byways in customary suits of solemn black, and enters the various doors of various churches for a brief interlude of sermon and service. What does it all mean? What amount of inward vital governing conviction, not only apparent on Sunday, but genuine through the week, does the goodly procession of church-goers represent? That is a deep, perhaps a disagreeable, but a necessary question. The power of Mammon we know. There is no mistake as to that. Mammon is the modern cult that consumes men's lives as religion did in the Middle Ages; but as religion does not

consume the lives even of those who go to church on Sundays, what does religion amount to in the mind of the average man who does not believe himself an unbeliever? . . . At the end of the century the world has been turned not into a vast monastery, which was the extravagant tendency of the ages of faith, but into the opposite extravagance of a gigantic machine for the production of money, and the treasures of this world. And as to the average man's average thought of religion, it is this, that if there is anything beyond—well, there is something beyond. No difference of philosophical theory will remove the fact that religious belief has been the keystone of society. We stand under that vast and ponderous arch and watch the loosening of the keystone, which no one knows how to replace."

That is striking language to find in a daily newspaper. Let me quote a few sentences equally trenchant and outspoken from the pen of another eminent journalist. "There is no commanding vision," says Mr. William Clarke, in a remarkable paper which appeared in a popular magazine some months ago, "there is no commanding vision in the Britain, in the civilized world, of to-day. Business and amusement absorb most of the time of men; things material weigh down the mind. Cynical indifference to every subject save money is the tone of society, whether we are in London, or Berlin, or New York. . . . Like Jeshurun, England has waxed fat, and once more it is proclaimed in accents that cannot be mistaken, that man as he is cannot morally afford to wax fat. The well-groomed exterior of Britain, the sleek and prosperous

citizen, the thirst for constant amusements, these things cannot hide from the penetrating mind the absence of any Divine purpose governing the general life. There is no vision. As one passes the well-fed, self-complacent crowd on the street, one sees with Lowell a dead soul's epitaph on every face." These are not the judgments of preachers by profession. They are not, however, the less deserving, but perhaps the more deserving of our consideration on that account. And there have not been wanting voices within the Church that have spoken sadly enough in the same strain. "The pure and simple faith of the elder time," writes Dr. Martineau, "has passed away. The great objects of trust lie off at second hand; and men discuss with the lips each other's creeds instead of going into silence with their own God." "In the old days," said Canon Liddon, "God was the centre of Christian thought, and now I fear we must say that man is too often the centre. In those old days the Christian soul conceived itself as the humble planet moving round the central Sun of Righteousness; in these days the Christian soul claims to be itself the centre of the system, while the true Sun of Righteousness is bidden move round it, and His beauty, His brightness, are estimated chiefly, if not solely, by the lights and shadows which He throws upon it." "God Himself," said Dr. Dale, "is passing out of our life. In every direction I see the signs that we are living without God—in the Church as well as in the world. We have made ourselves the centre of our religious thought. We are conscious that we ourselves are alive; but He has ceased to

be the living God, with an infinite fervour of joy in righteousness, which is obedience to His will, and an infinite fervour of hatred to sin, which is the transgression of His commandments." These are strong statements ; but I think few will be prepared to deny that there is any ground for such complaints as to the prevailing habit and tendency of the age.

And what we shall feel perhaps to be a still more serious matter is that there are so many who are able to acquiesce in this disappearance of religion in the old sense. "The old faith in God is gone, no doubt," they seem to say, "or going, but after all there is no great cause for regret. We can do without it. Life in the present is full of interest, without any apprehension of things unseen and eternal, of which we can really know nothing." It is true that all have not felt like that. I remember how sorrowfully George Romanes spoke of the terrible sense of impoverishment and desolation that came to him when he seemed to be driven to the conclusion that there was no solid ground for his religious convictions and hopes. And even Clifford could speak with regret of the loss of the Great Companion who could no more be looked for in the time of man's loneliness. But what often strikes us as being so strange and so mournful a thing nowadays is that there are those who seem able to part with religion without a sigh. Heaven becomes dim and fades away and is gone ; and they do not seem to care. It is not simply that they cannot believe in it, but it ceases to be necessary to them. They can live and they can die without it. They

need neither its inspirations nor its comforts. Nor can we honestly say that these are persons who are without any fineness of character, or spiritual instincts, or noble aspirations. Of course that is true of some who have put religion aside ; but it is certainly not true of all. We cannot deny, we do not wish to deny, that we have known men and women whom we have honoured and loved for the beauty and strength of their character, who have been gentle, unselfish, generous, unworldly, conscientious in an eminent degree, who yet seemed to be altogether unconcerned with religion. I think I cannot be wrong in surmising that one of the most anxious, most painful problems that some of us have had to deal with has been the problem presented by these upright, honourable, lovable persons for whom religion has no significance or charm. We have not known what to make of them, how to interpret them. Is religion so necessary, we have asked, if that noble-hearted man, this charming woman, can live such a good and apparently happy life, and yet afford to dispense with it ?

Now, in regard to such persons I should like to say that we must not be too ready to accept their own account of themselves, even though we may be sure that they are speaking with perfect sincerity. For they may have much more religion, and that of the deepest and truest sort, than they themselves are at all aware of. Religion we understand to be the personal relation of the soul with God. But cannot that relation exist without the soul being itself conscious of it ? Surely this is possible. In the first place, God may be dealing with you, and

working within you, and yet you may not know that it is God. Does that never happen? Does it not constantly happen? When our Lord talked with those two disciples on the way to Emmaus their eyes were holden that they should not know Him. None the less, it was He who was teaching them, and causing their hearts to burn within them. And need we doubt that the Eternal Word is speaking still to those whose eyes cannot discern His glory, and that the Eternal Spirit is working within them though they may not be able to interpret the meaning of what is taking place? And who will say that those are wholly without religion whom God has not forsaken? Why, often it has happened that when the soul has come at last into the full light of His countenance, it has known in looking back that the merciful and guiding hand has never been withdrawn through all those years of ignorance and darkness.

And, though this is perhaps not so obvious, we may believe that often there may be on our side religious faith and reverence and consecration, though we may think and say that God has been lost to us altogether. Think of those good, true-hearted, high-minded people who seem to have no religion. Are they not really trusting God and honouring Him, though without the knowledge that they are in any personal relation with Him at all? Remember that God, in the mystery of His essential nature, is beyond all human comprehension, and that it is only under certain aspects in which He may reveal Himself that we are able to behold Him, and only limited and imperfect conceptions of Him that we

are able to form in our minds. We speak of worshipping God as though we all meant the same thing, as though when we named that great Name we all had the same image before our minds. But it is not so in fact. There is indeed but one God, and yet every man has his own God. St. Paul had been a worshipper of God in his earlier days, a very sincere and zealous worshipper. But when the light of the knowledge of the ineffable glory shone into his heart in the face of Jesus Christ, was it not another God that he worshipped? Did not the Holy Name then acquire quite a new meaning? We worshipped God when we were little children. But though we worship Him still, it is not now in quite the same way. We thought then "as a child," but we think differently now that we are men. Conceive, then, of a man who believes with all his heart in truth, in goodness, in love, in purity, and who is faithful in his devotion to those great ideas and principles. May not such a man be said to be believing in God, and worshipping God, under the form and aspect of truth, of goodness, of love, and of purity? It is taught by some that the highest and most solemn way of worshipping the Eternal is under the form of bread on the altar. There in that material element the worshipper is to behold and revere his Maker. But do you not think it may be as true and as acceptable a kind of worship to worship God under the form of Truth in its majesty, or Love in its inexhaustible grace and charm? Here is a man to whom religion means devotion to a venerable institution, or to a complicated system of rites and ceremonies, or to certain

traditional beliefs to which he is attached because they are traditional. And he has the reputation of being a very religious person, an exceptionally religious person. But is he necessarily much nearer to God than his neighbour, to whom these external things are of less account, but who honours his conscience, and cares with all his heart for all such things as he feels to be lovely, and true, and pure, and of good report? It is, indeed, a very great gain to be able to think of God as the One Great Spirit, in whom there meet "all things mighty, grave and sweet," the One Source and Inspiration of all that is good. But if there are any who are honouring and following the highest they can discern in humility and love, I for one will not say that they are without religion, though they make no profession, and claim no knowledge of eternal things.

So much I think it is just and right to say. And yet religion in the more ordinary sense, in the sense involved in the recognition of God as the great Creative and Governing Mind, as the Eternal Spirit and Father of spirits, is on many grounds a thing of incomparable value. It would be impossible for those to whom it has such a meaning to say otherwise, however anxious they might be to acknowledge that the root of the matter was in others who could not speak of a similar faith and experience. And I desire now to suggest to any who may be doubting whether religion, in the common acceptation of the word, is indispensable, or of any great value and importance, some considerations which should help us to realize its inestimable worth.

First, let me say that if there is a God who may be known and loved, it is surely a somewhat deplorable thing that there should be any person in ignorance of a fact of such supreme interest. The present age is an age in which the value of knowledge, as knowledge, is very generally recognized. And it is nowhere more cordially recognized than among those who are inclined to question the value and use of religion. But suppose that God has revealed Himself, and that He may be known by mortal men. I speak now from the standpoint of those who can accept that view. Suppose that there is something which can be known about the character and purposes of the Creator of the world. Is not such knowledge, simply as knowledge, very much worth possessing, allowing for the moment that it is attainable? It is a humiliating thing for a grown-up man not to know anything of the laws and forces of the natural world. You would be ashamed to be ignorant of the simple elementary facts about the sun, and the moon, and the planets, which are taught to every child at school. You would be sorry for a man who had to confess that he had never heard of the law of gravitation, and did not know what it meant. He might live in tolerable comfort in spite of his ignorance. Still, the law of gravitation is something that every grown-up person ought to know something about. But if that is so, is it not an unfortunate thing, a humiliating thing, for a grown-up person not to know anything of that great Power who has created and governs all the worlds, assuming, as I do assume now, that some knowledge on this subject is possible. If you, as a man of

science, say that you do not see that religion is of very much use, I think I may not unreasonably reply that it is as interesting and useful to know what God is, and that for the mere truth's sake, as to know something of the constitution and habits of those humblest forms of life which you are investigating with such extraordinary care, and such ceaseless and praiseworthy devotion. You wear yourself out in the study of the anatomy of an insect, and I do not blame you. I honour you. But with your consuming zeal for knowing, will you not admit that there may be some interest in knowing something about the Eternal, if by care and toil and meditation and prayer anything can be learned about His nature and His ways ?

Again, consider what limitation there must be in our life, how the soul must be dwarfed, and its development hindered, if, supposing that God and the spiritual world are great realities, we are living without any insight into them, or any kind of conscious relation with them.

A man can get on very well, it is said, without religion. And no doubt he often does get on very well, in his own judgment. But whatever his own satisfaction may be, is it not possible that there may be something terribly lacking in his life ? something the loss of which is none the less serious because he is himself not aware of what he is missing ? A man who has no mind may get on very well, as it seems to himself. There are imbeciles, I suppose, who get on very well. They are perfectly contented and happy. Nevertheless, we regard a man whose

mental nature has never been developed as a man much to be pitied. He is deficient, we say of such a man. Exactly! that is just what he is, deficient, not fully a man, inasmuch as he is wanting in reason. Or, though our minds may be quick and powerful in certain directions, we may be without those gifts and faculties by which, if we had been endowed with them, we might enter into many worlds of activity and experience which are capable of adding enormously to the happiness of those who are able to move in them freely. Is it no misfortune to be shut out from those fair regions? Are we not greatly the losers if we have no understanding of the things which they contain? Must not our life be much duller and poorer than it would have been if we had been permitted to take our place and play our part in those spacious kingdoms, and those palaces of wonder and delight? You are musical. Have you no compassion for the man who has no feeling for music? You are a reader. Do you not think then that those to whom the world of literature is a world unknown are rather badly off, even though in some ways they may seem to be getting on very well? You take an interest in science. What do you think of those who know nothing and care nothing about all that is taking place in that wide domain? Is it enough, after all, for a man to be thinking that he is getting on very well? No, it is certainly not enough. A man may think that, and be caring for no single thing in heaven or in earth but eating and drinking or money-making. And that is not to be getting on very well. Not for a man. These are not occupations with which

anyone who wishes to come to the maturity of true manhood has any right to be content. And what may be said of music or literature or science may surely be said with much greater emphasis in regard to religion. Think of that Kingdom of God of which Christ spoke, and the glory and worth of which to Him were so immeasurable. Think of those who rule in it, of those majestic Powers and Presences who make it what it is. Think of the great company of those who are its citizens. Think of its pursuits, its interests, its opportunities, its privileges, its rewards. And think of the lot of that man to whom all the grace and wonder of that kingdom is as a sealed book, whose feet have never trodden the soil of that sweet country, who has never breathed its pure invigorating air, whose eyes have never seen the Kingdom of God, who is of the earth, earthy. Think of that man, and be sorry for him. Why, there is an entire department of his being which has no life in it. There are faculties and powers within him, and those the noblest he possesses, which have not yet begun to grow, which can scarcely be said to have been called into existence. He has not been born again. There is the natural man only, not the spiritual man. Things unseen and eternal, the glory of God, the sweetness and majesty of Him who is the Sun and Saviour of this dark world, the power of the Holy Spirit, and all the heavenly hosts, are beyond his range, are to him as though they were not. He is getting on very well! No, he is not getting on well at all, not as he should be getting on, who was born in the image of God, and whom God has

called to be His friend and His child. He is but a part of a man as yet. He is like

sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain.

He has not come to himself.

Something also should be said of the peculiar joy, peculiar in its intensity as well as in its quality of endurance, of which religion is the source. It is idle to deny that not a little happiness is possible without religion, and there is no reason why we should wish to deny it. And yet, surely, the cup of blessing, of which the man whose hope is in the Lord is permitted to drink, is like no earthly cup. The joy of those who believe in Christ, and love Him though they have not seen Him, is described by Peter as being unspeakable and full of glory. That would be extravagant language to use of any joys known to us who are no longer capable of being carried away by the ardours and ecstasies of youth. But there are those who will say that the joy of the Lord, which it has been given to them to taste, is a joy which is truly unspeakable and full of glory. When Henry More made what to him was a great discovery, the discovery of the nearness and accessibility of God, he entered into an experience of peace and happiness which never forsook him. On the day before he died an old friend came to see him. More was at first silent, but presently broke out: "Doctor, I have marvellous things to tell you." "Sir," said the other, "you are full, I suppose, of Divine joy." "Full," he said, with tears in his eyes. Religion is worth something if it can teach us the secret of such holy gladness.

And I am not sure that much of our happiness in things that seem to belong only to this world is not deeply related to religious faith and feeling. That which is dear for its grace, is often yet dearer for its mystery. And when we search into the heart of the mystery do we not find that it is the sense of God, the wonder and glory of the Eternal, that moves us so profoundly? In Coleridge's "Hymn before Sunrise at Chamouni" he tells us how, carried away by the splendour of the scene, he lost sight of all its visible and material elements, and "worshipped the Invisible alone." You know what that means. You know that among the greatest moments of your life have been those moments when there has been spread out before you some scene of enchanting beauty. It has been almost intoxicating in its effect upon you, the strength and majesty of the mountains, the sound of the cataract, the sweetness of the valleys, the delicate charm of the little flowers at your feet. To sit there and gaze on all that wealth of beauty has been the perfection of pleasure. But suppose that a voice which you could not distrust had come to you and assured you that there was behind all that glory no mind, no will, no spirit; that all had come to pass through the action of purely physical forces and mechanical processes, what would become of your happiness then? It would turn to a dull despair, and the smile of nature would be as the smile on the face of the dead, terrible to behold, and all the world that was so fair would become

more desolate, more dreary cold
Than a forsaken bird's nest, filled with snow.

It is the hidden life in nature, it is the Divine mystery of it, to which it owes its deepest charm. My delight in it is gone if I may no longer regard it as the handiwork of God.

Further, if there be such a thing as companionship with God, is it not a very great privation to have to go without that companionship? We have our human friends to cheer us. Yes, thank God for that—if there is a God to thank. We have these dear and true comrades, and the comfort that comes from their fellowship is beyond all reckoning. But it does not avail at all times. The brother who was with you yesterday, and through so many happy yesterdays, to-day is gone, and will return no more through all the sad to-morrows. How often it happens to us thus to be bereft and forsaken. “All, all are gone,” some of us are beginning to say, “the old, familiar faces.” And even when our friends are still with us, there is a barrier beyond which those of them who are most intimate cannot pass. There are things they cannot know. There are chambers into which they may not enter. And if there be One who can at all truly be described as the Father of our spirits; if there be One, both human and Divine, who fully understands us, and can perfectly sympathize because of that fulness of knowledge; who never fails or deserts those who put their trust in Him; who is with them in their darkest hours, and their most sorrowful moods; who is with them even in the valley of the shadow of death; if there be such a great Companion, is it not a thing worth knowing, and an unspeakable blessing for us mortal men in our times of loneliness and fear?

Nor must we forget the comfort that religion brings to us when the burden of the mystery of the future hangs heavy on our minds. For religion is

the golden key
That opes the palace of Eternity.

No man who knows himself to be in very truth the child of the living God can conceive it to be possible that the Eternal Father will forsake the work of His own hands. We do not know, and we cannot know, what we shall be, but we know, if we have any genuine religious faith, that God cannot put out of existence for ever, like sparks that fall into the ocean, those whom He has called into the fellowship of His Son. If religion did nothing else for us, it would be worth much because of this assurance which it gives us of a glory yet to be revealed. Do you remember what John Stuart Mill did when the companion of his life, who was also the joy of his heart, was taken from him? "Since her death," he writes, "I have sought such consolation as seemed possible to me. I bought a cottage as close as possible to the place where she is buried, and there I live during a great portion of the year." And it was well. We cannot grudge the lonely spirit that cottage hard by the grave. But how poor a thing, if you compare it with the hope and consolation of the Gospel! Do not say it does not matter whether we have religion or not. It does matter a great deal to some people. It matters certainly to those whose hearts would break with grief were it not for its revelations and its hopes.

And is there not much to be said also for religion

as an incentive and a sanction in the moral life? What are you going to put in the place of it? There are good and honourable men, we are told, who have no religion. Well, we have frankly acknowledged that fine moral characters are possible where there is no clear conception of supernatural facts, or definite belief in a divine Person. But have you considered what foundation there would be for morality if the idea of God were cut clean out of the minds of men? Search into the significance of those abstract virtues to which many whom we admire are so beautifully loyal. What significance do you find in them except in so far as they indicate the character and reveal the will of the Eternal? The truth is, that duty is meaningless apart from religion, and morality a mere question of prudence, or habit, or tradition. Why should I speak the truth? Why should I keep myself pure? Why should I live a just and temperate life? Why should I make sacrifices for other people? Why should I not eat, and drink, and be as merry as I can, if all faith in things Divine and invisible is a foolish dream and the hope of the world is a lie? "For thirty years," says Israel Hands, in *Treasure Island*, "for thirty years I've sailed the seas, and seen good and bad, better and worse, provisions running out, knives going, and what not. Well now, I tell you, I never seen good come of goodness yet. Him as strikes first is my fancy; dead men don't bite; them's my views. Amen so be it." Yes, and there will be many to argue in that fashion. They will not say perhaps that good never comes of goodness. They will allow that honesty is sometimes

the best policy. But they will claim that now and then it does not pay to be honest, and they will see no reason why they should betray their own interests, and be honest at their own cost. And I do not see who can blame them if all sense of God and heavenly things should be for ever rooted out from our souls.

These are among the uses of religion. But we shall be told by some that they do not deny its value, not for a moment. They are not to be numbered with those who say that

Whether there is a God or not,
It matters very little,
Since I and mine, thank Somebody,
Are not in want of victual.

They think it matters a great deal whether there is a God or not. And their great trouble is that they know not where they can find Him. They would give much for any glimpses that would make them less forlorn. If they could but touch the hem of His garment they would be made whole. But there seems to be no point of contact. He hides Himself. He never comes within the range of their experience. He will not show them His glory.

That has been the complaint of hungry souls in every age, and it is a common complaint of our age. There are voices without and within that seem to be saying to us, "Where is thy God?" and we do not know how to answer them.

It is felt by many that there is much in modern scientific conceptions the tendency of which has been to put the Creator at a distance from us. When

men supposed that if it thundered God was speaking in some special way, or that when a great catastrophe happened, it was a visitation from Him, there were moments, at least, when He became a great reality, and was felt to be close at hand. But now that such events are no longer recognized as interferences, but are known to be part of the universal order, we cannot feel the occasional thrill that our fathers felt when it seemed to them that the Almighty had bowed Himself and come down. And yet God is surely not the more remote from us because He is with us always, or because we know that He acts not in caprice, but in harmony with eternal law, and that the creation is the perfection of Divine order. We would touch the hem of His garment ; but what if the world be truly His living garment, and we ourselves are beset by Him behind and before, and are in most intimate and vital contact with Him, through every moment of our existence ? And if in some ways science seems to have removed Him far from us, yet I have been told by those who have given themselves to biological research—and I can well believe what they say—that they never pursue their investigations into the beginnings of life without a feeling of religious awe, as those that are carried, as it were, within the veil, and find themselves in the Presence Chamber, and face to face with the Creator, as under their eyes He calls things new and strange into being.

Ah, do you say, that is wonderful, but it is not enough, it is not all that I desire ? No, there is indeed more that we desire. But have we not more ? “The Word became flesh,” says John, “and dwelt

among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." That is John's testimony. Was he mistaken? Are we sure he was mistaken? "It is God," writes Paul, "that said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Is this nothing but the fantastic dream of a visionary? Will you stand up and say that? But if things are as John, and Paul, and ten thousand more of the saintliest of mankind have believed them to be, is God after all so far away, so inaccessible? Nay, verily, but He is here in our midst, in the form of Him who was made in the likeness of men. And if it be said that even Jesus, who left our world so many ages ago, is nowhere within our reach; that He is on some throne exalted far on high at the right hand of God—if that be our complaint, it is a complaint for which we have no warrant if we accept the New Testament as our guide. For if there is anything clearly taught in the New Testament it is that that Eternal Spirit that breathed through all the life and words and ways of the human Jesus breathes still upon us, and speaks within us, and lives within us; so that if there is any hunger in our hearts for Divine things, it is God's finger that is touching us, and if we are conscious of any sorrow for sin, it is God's voice that is pleading with us, and if there is any wish for holiness, or any impulse of love, or any kind or degree of heavenward aspiration, it is God who is overshadowing us, controlling us, inspiring us, touching us to the quick of our spiritual natures,

and leading us, in the greatness of His Fatherly mercy, in the way everlasting.

And we must have faith to believe that these things are so. By faith the elders obtained a good report, and it is for us, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, to call into exercise that most noble and precious gift of faith which is latent in every human soul, and to brace ourselves to believe that to us, too, the Eternal speaks, as to our fathers, and that to us, as well as to them, the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven shall be revealed, if we will put away our prejudice and our pride. But that perhaps is just what we find it so hard to do. Our sin has much of our spiritual dulness and blindness to answer for. What a moment it often is for a man when he does truly confess ; what a moment for himself and for others ! How near, how real, God becomes then ! A writer greatly esteemed among us has recently told how, when some poor woman at a humble religious meeting on the Continent rose and acknowledged a dishonest act of her past life, an awe and a silence fell upon that meeting as though the Judgment had been set, and the Book opened. No wonder. For no splendour of religious ceremonial, no service high or anthem clear, can so bring all Heaven before our eyes as the cry of a soul that has returned to its everlasting rest in the bosom of God.

I must come to an end ; but there is a practical question to which I must ask you, when you have opportunity, to give more careful attention than is possible now and here. It is the very serious question how far the life and work of our Churches

are really helping to make religion a great power amongst us. The chief purpose of the Church should be, one would think, to develop the religious life, to bring men nearer to God. How far is this sacred purpose being accomplished in our experience? There have been times when the Church, as an institution, has been a positive hindrance to religion. We may hope, I think, that it is not so to-day. None of us would make the charge against our Churches that they are keeping the souls of men away from God. But are they doing all that they might be doing to bring God and the souls of men together? I trust I may venture to ask whether there is always that reverence, that seriousness, in our public services which would help those who attend them to realize what a solemn, what a wonderful thing an act of worship is? Your service has the reputation of being a bright and interesting service. And no doubt it merits the reputation which it enjoys. The building is a beautiful one. It is well filled. The people who fill it are known as the better sort of people. They are well dressed and well behaved. The music is admirably rendered. The sermon is clever and eloquent. It sparkles with good things. And all this is considered to be very satisfactory. But it is not everything. It is not the chief thing. For, in truth, the question is not whether the service is a bright service, but whether it is worship, in any real sense of the word; not whether the building is furnished with all modern improvements and finished in the best style, but whether God is in the place, so that the stranger entering in is made to feel that he is on holy ground.

I have been inclined to wonder whether the human element is not often too conspicuous in our services, whether the flow of human speech is not too constant, whether there might not with advantage be sometimes silences and pauses, so that God might have a chance of being heard in the quiet places of the soul. We talk, and talk, and talk, for ever, and drown with our shrill voices those whispers which we could hear if we would but be still and wait till they should become articulate and clear.

And I have sometimes asked myself, too, whether we are willing enough to be sometimes quite alone, not alone in the sense in which a man may be said to be alone when he is in his study, surrounded by his books or absorbed in some favourite pursuit—that is not solitude. But alone in the sense of being separated from all those things which so possess and engross the mind as to make us forgetful of our true selves, alone in the sense of being brought face to face with our own souls. We close our eyes when we pray, as a matter of devotional habit, but the eyes of the mind need also to be closed if there is to be any true vision of eternal things. Alas! we are so busy, that the Angels of God may come and go and we do not know that anything is happening; so careful and troubled about many things, that the words of Jesus fall on unresponsive ears, if indeed we so much as remember that He is in the house at all. At least we are too restless, too impatient to sit at His feet and listen to what He may have to say. And great is our loss.

I am not, however, so much concerned to suggest what may help us, or what may hinder us, in the

religious life, as I am anxious to commend the cultivation of that life as a matter that we cannot afford to forget, as the one thing that is needful more than anything else, for our Churches and ourselves.

With what ambitions and with what hopes are we looking to the new century, which is so soon to dawn upon us? There are, I suppose, many things on which our minds are set, and for the accomplishment of which we intend to labour with all our strength. We shall contend for such rights and privileges as we believe to be still due to us. We shall demand a religious equality more complete than has been known as yet in this country. We shall be on the side of peace, on the side of purity, on the side of temperance. We shall aim at diminishing ignorance and pauperism and crime. We shall endeavour to make the life of our great cities more wholesome and sweet, and in every possible way we shall strive, God helping us, to better the condition of the people. These are our hopes. These are the things we mean to do, and they are the things we ought to mean to do. For we are poor Christians if we refuse to concern ourselves with such matters.

And yet I pray that with all our zeal, our most laudable and Christian zeal, we shall not forget that what we need most, and what the world needs most, is God, and that, though we may be successful in our philanthropic efforts, beyond our dreams, we shall heal the hurt of the daughter of His people but slightly, unless that profound need of the human soul is satisfied. Let us not be afraid of

being charged with other-worldliness. There is small danger with most of us of going wrong in that direction. Neither let us be too sensitive to the taunt that we care more about men's souls than we do about their bodies. Such criticism is probably strangely wide of the mark. A danger to which most of us are much more liable is the danger of doing the man who is poor the cruel wrong of assuming that spiritual things are things about which he, poor wretch, need not trouble himself, that they are the luxury of the well-to-do, and that the blessing of the poor is good wages and the common decencies of life. To talk in that way is to sin alike against your brother and against his Lord. For high or low, rich or poor, it is religion which is the supreme necessity for us all. It is God, and His presence, and His love, that we must have, or we perish. And is it not our desire and our supplication to-day that our Churches may remember this, and that they may care most through all the time that is coming, for faith and prayer, for Divine light and supernatural power; for that sense of the Infinite which makes the common life a consecrated thing; for the glorious majesty of that kingdom which is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ?

III.—THE PRESENT TEMPER AND SPIRIT OF THE CHURCHES IN REGARD TO FOREIGN MISSIONARY WORK ¹

THERE is an impression in the minds of many that the interest taken by our Churches at home in the extension of Christ's Kingdom abroad is by no means so general or so lively as the importance and sacredness of the work would seem to demand. Our people are not caring for the spiritual state of the heathen races as it might be supposed they would care. That is what some are saying, in tones of sadness and wonder, and with evident trouble of heart.

Those who take this view judge in the main, I imagine, from what they themselves see and hear. They travel up and down the country, and they meet with much that is pleasant and gratifying: but they do not meet with a great deal of missionary enthusiasm. It is a matter of personal observation. But figures might be quoted, which certainly seem, to some extent, to support this view. It appears, for instance, from a statement recently published in *The Nonconformist*, that the income of the London Missionary Society, from subscriptions, donations and collections, is less, at the present time, by some

¹ A paper read before the Congregational Union at Hanley on October 7, 1885.

thousands of pounds than it was ten years ago. Practically, it may be said that the income has been stationary for fifteen years. Meanwhile the work has been growing, and the consequence is that the Society is now in debt to the extent of more than £11,000. That is a very serious state of things.

It will be said that too much importance must not be attached to money contributions. No, not *too* much importance. But money gifts represent interest, sympathy, consecration, and when they begin to fall off it is impossible not to be a little downcast.

But then, the times have been so bad during the last dozen years. No doubt they have been bad. But the plea of bad times may easily be used too liberally. Sometimes our friends tell us that trade is in a really shocking state, and that they are losing money every day, and are unable, to their great regret, to do this or that. And we commiserate them, and become quite mournful about them. But presently, alas! they are taken from us, and their wills are published in the unmerciful newspapers, and we find then that, after all, their struggle with poverty had scarcely been so desperate as we had feared. All the fault is not to be put down to the times.

Now I do not wish to indulge in the language of lamentation or reproach. I judge nobody. I blame nobody. I thank God, rather, for all that He has enabled our Churches to accomplish in the foreign field. But I have been asked by the Committee to deal with this question of the feeling prevailing amongst us in regard to the missionary

enterprise ; and I hope you will bear with me while I say what is in my heart, with the utmost brevity and frankness.

Why is it that we are not thinking more of our missionary work, and doing more for the support and furtherance of it ?

For one thing, perhaps, some of us would reply, there is so much else to think about. The disciples, on one memorable occasion, were so taken up with the thought of the unwisdom of dispensing with dinner, or delaying it too long, that they had no eyes to behold the world's great harvest-fields. And we, too, forget them, being otherwise occupied.

There are, for instance, the cares of this world—domestic cares, business cares, cares of all kinds that beset us on every hand, and hinder us from taking much heed of things which are far away, and with which we do not seem to have any immediate and personal concern. What with all the competition of the day, the difficulty of holding our own in business, the difficulty of providing education for our children, the difficulty of settling them in life when their school-days are over, the difficulty, it may even be, of providing the necessaries of life for those dependent upon us—what with all these difficulties, and a host of others, how can we be expected to think much of the people of India or China, or the dwellers in the distant islands of the seas ! It is not reasonable to expect it !

I am sure we should all speak with the greatest sympathy of those who are thus burdened with anxieties, and that we should be very sorry to demand of them anything that seemed to be unreasonable.

And yet we cannot forget the words that were spoken once to those who were perplexed with similar troubles : “ Be not anxious, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed ? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first His Kingdom.” It is thus that the Saviour speaks, and He speaks as a mother who would quiet her child’s alarms : it is thus that He speaks and is speaking to-day, through all the noise and distraction of our modern life, to such as are oppressed with worldly care. And when He speaks of seeking God’s Kingdom first, He surely means much more than seeking the salvation of our own souls. He means that our chief care is ever to be the promotion, by all means in our power, of that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, in *which*, and not in meat and drink, the Kingdom of God consists. Nor can anyone doubt that by making the Kingdom our first care, and by consecrating to its interests the strength which would otherwise be wasted in idle regrets or equally idle fears, we shall obtain the surest relief from the pressure and tyranny of all other cares. For to live for the Kingdom is to learn of Christ, and take His yoke upon us, and so to “ find rest unto our souls.”

Or we might find, on self-inquiry, that we had not been so much engrossed with personal cares as with political movements and controversies ; that our minds had been too full of politics to think much of the religious condition of the world. It is no discredit to any man that he is a keen politician. No boast is more inglorious or more stupid than the

boast that we care nothing for the political condition and prospects of our country. But the powers of most of us are limited, and it may easily be that if we yield without reserve to the fascinations of the political arena, we shall fail to do justice to the demands upon our thought and care of mankind at large. Then, if the morning newspaper is not on the breakfast-table we shall want to know the reason why ; but if the *Missionary Chronicle* is late of arriving, we shall bear the delay with fortitude. We shall be eager to learn what impression Mr. Chamberlain is making by his speeches, but not so eager to know what cheer our brethren have had in their remote and solitary stations on the Mission field. If any seat has been in danger of being lost to our party, we shall be all impatience to learn what the result of the contest has been ; but shall we care so much to know whether another comrade has fallen by the great African lake ? The things that fill the columns of the Press, the things of which men talk in the trains, the things which are close to us—these things will absorb our minds ; and things far away and out of sight will have a poor chance of gaining our attention.

But I will not say : Let us think less of politics, and more of Missions. I will say rather : Let us note the political aspect of all true missionary work. Let us recognize the fact that the most high-minded and far-seeing politician, in the best sense of that word, is the man who is caring the most for the missionary enterprise. Is not that a fact ? Look at India. India is one of our great political problems ; and he is a poor and narrow

politician indeed who has no concern for that vast empire. But what is the most beneficent policy for India? It is not the policy of this Viceroy or that; but it is the policy of the missionary societies. The natives, among whom he lived, used to say of Lord Lawrence that "Jan Lawrence" knew everything. And what did John Lawrence say? He said, after forty years of Indian life: "I believe, notwithstanding all that the English people have done to benefit India, the missionaries have done more than all other agencies combined." If that be so, then, if we desire to be something better than mere party politicians, if we really care for the great name of England, and have any worthy conceptions of the true end of government, let us make our zeal for the spread of Christ's kingdom in India one, at least, of our political enthusiasms. Consider that there is room here for devotion that shall be wholly free from even the suspicion of self-seeking. We Independents have had a long and a hard fight in England for the principles we believe in, and the liberties and privileges we have regarded as our due. I do not think it can be said with justice that we have cared more for ourselves than for the truth or principle for which we have fought. But God forbid, I say, that any man should ever be able to bring the charge against us that we could fight well for our own freedom and our proper rights, but that we showed no corresponding interest in the emancipation of those who have suffered from a bondage infinitely sadder and more degrading than any political disability under which we have laboured. It was a hard fate not to be permitted

to worship our Father in Heaven according to our conscience. It is a much harder fate not to know any Father in Heaven at all. Let no malicious person say that we cared much for our own freedom, but cared little to lead the nations into the possession of that yet nobler and diviner liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free.

Or, again, our plea might be : " It is sorrowful enough to think of the heathen abroad ; but think how many heathen there are at home ! Listen to the bitter cries that pierce our ears from those who are in misery and darkness close at hand. How should we give much heed to the needs of the people at the ends of the earth, when there is all this pauperism, drunkenness, lust, oppression, shame and sin, and moral ruin, at our own doors ? Does not the work at home demand all our sympathies ? "

I meet with many who take up this strain. I do not find that all who so speak are exerting themselves to any painful extent on behalf of the needy at home. But unquestionably there are some of them upon whose hearts the condition of things in our own land is as the very burden of the Lord. To such persons I would speak only with the utmost gentleness and respect. But I would venture to ask them not to forget how much is being attempted, and what large sums are being expended on every hand for the help of our necessitous at home ; and how little is being done, in comparison, for the help of the millions upon millions in foreign lands. Let me speak for a moment of my own city of Bristol, which contains about 220,000 inhabitants. Last year a committee, of which I was a member, was

appointed to inquire into the condition of the poor in Bristol. The report of that committee has been published. It contains a chapter on the provision made for the religious instruction of the people; and in reporting on this subject it says: "There are 180 places of worship in Bristol and its suburbs. There are 365 ministers of religion, though not all engaged in active duty. Religion is taught in every day-school in the city. There are large Sunday schools, well filled, and conducted by devoted religious teachers. There is quite an army of laymen, belonging to all classes of society, working with intelligence, zeal, and persistence, in spreading religious influences among the poor," and so on. So there are 365 duly appointed ministers for Bristol, to say nothing of the "army of laymen." That is tantamount to saying that about as much is being done for Bristol as for the whole of China, with its population of three hundred millions at least.

But there are the country districts. We have not done our duty by the country districts, I admit. But can you find a village in England in which there is no place of Christian worship or instruction of any kind? I hear men say: "Why do you send such large sums abroad, when the money is wanted so badly at home?" "Large sums!" Why, we heard some years ago from the platform of this Union that in one English county alone—namely, the county of Suffolk, which contains about 380,000 inhabitants—the sum of £200,000 was provided annually for the spiritual instruction of the people, in connection with one single religious body. That

is just twice as much as the London Missionary Society spends on the eight hundred millions of the heathen. I dislike exceedingly making comparisons between home claims and foreign claims ; but I confess it does pain me when I hear men grudging the *trifle* (for in comparison with the needs of the world and our resources at home, it is but a trifle) that we are sparing for the furtherance of the Gospel abroad.

But I gather that doubts are beginning to arise in some quarters whether it is much worth our while to spare even that trifle. Some of us are asking whether the venerable religions of other nations are not very good religions on the whole, and religions in the possession of which they may do wisely to rest content. That means, in plain English, that while we think, perhaps, that Christ is worth our keeping, seeing He has been with us so long, we do not think that He is worth giving to those to whom He is still a stranger. They may know nothing whatever about Him, and be no great losers after all. Have we come to that ? Is this the value we have learned at last to set upon our Lord ? To the world He is worth nothing. To us in England He is, to be sure, something. Life has a little more meaning for us because He lived. Death is a little less awful to us because He died. Sorrow is a little less overwhelming because He bore the cross. God is a little dearer to us because the light of the knowledge of His glory shone in the face of Jesus. Heaven is a little nearer, and a little more homelike, because He is there, preparing a place for us. Yes ! He is something to us. It is as well

that we happen to have heard of Him. It is something when we stand by the grave of our dead, and our own hearts are ready to die within us, to think of Christ and recall His words of promise. It is something, when the burden of sin lies heavy upon the spirit, to think of the sweetness of His mercy, and the wealth of His compassion, and the power of His redeeming grace. Yes! He is worth our keeping! But as to putting ourselves to any trouble that others who know as well as we do what bereavement means, and what sin means, may share Him, too—we are not so certain about that. We doubt whether it is worth while.

The Apostles had no such doubts. He had dwelt among them, and they had beheld His glory, and it was to them as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father. And they had no peace in keeping the great vision to themselves. It was too grand, too fair to be selfishly enjoyed; and they said: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us, that our joy may be full." I would not be misunderstood. I yield to no man in respect for what is true in the faiths of the world. But I have met with but one Jesus Christ; and until I find His fellow, it is His Gospel which I must preach to every creature.

But what are the results? Are we really making any progress? Every man has a right to ask that question; and I only wish that every man who asks it would honestly endeavour to find out for himself what the true answer is. For my part, I can only say that to me the success of our enterprise is simply

amazing. I have quoted Lord Lawrence's estimate of the value of missions in India. Keshub Chunder Sen went much farther than the most sanguine missionary ever did, and declared that India was already Christian at heart. In China the rate of progress during the last forty years has been nothing short of marvellous. Compare the condition of the South Sea Islands in the younger days of some of the older men among us, when they were the habitations of the most horrid cruelty, with their condition to-day, with their 274 native ordained ministers, their 632 unordained preachers, their 20,000 church members. The work in New Guinea during the last twelve years has been, as it seems to me, a miracle of grace. And as to Madagascar, well, I cannot understand how anybody can read the history of our work (and I thank God for the sense in which we can call it "our work") in that island, and ever listen again without impatience, or something approaching to indignant resentment, to the dull and ignorant sneer as to the uselessness of missions. No doubt we shall continue to meet with those who will tell us, not always with that air of profound disappointment with which you would expect a Christian man to come to such a conclusion, that nothing is being done. And no doubt there will be many, for years to come, who will smile at our enthusiasm, or say in a tone of patronage that it is very nice to see it. We cannot help that. And we need not mind it. But we can help ignoring the facts which we know to be facts, and being turned aside from the path of duty which we know to be the path of duty, by the unintelligent satire of

ignorant men. And I pray God we may all have that chivalrous and heroic mind which serves a sacred cause with only the more devotion the more it is despised !

But our own Churches ? Are they not to be our first care ? Are we not bound, in the first place, to do what we can to promote their well-being and develop their resources ? I agree to that entirely. But how shall we secure these great and primary ends ? In what does the true life of a Church consist ? Is not any Church strong and prosperous in the measure in which it is carried out of itself ; and in which scope is provided for the free exercise of its most generous instincts and its noblest energies ? Is it not fatal to a Church to be encouraged to think only of itself, or that which pertains directly to itself ? How dwelleth the love of God in such a Church ? Where is the sign and proof of its mystical union with the Redeemer ? Where is the evidence that it is alive ? Alive ! how can it be alive if the cry of the perishing appeals to it in vain ? It must lose its life if it would keep it. The fountain of its love must flow forth into the world if the waters are to be kept pure. We are prone to judge according to the appearance, and not to " judge righteous judgment " ; but we know well in our hearts that that is not the most prosperous Church which meets in the most elegant structure, or has the largest number of stops in its organ, or the most eloquent or learned preacher, or the most crowded congregation. No ! but that Church which has most of the mind of Christ. I may not neglect my duty to my Church, but my

first duty to it is, as I understand the matter, to do all that lies in me to deliver it from the curse of selfishness, and to foster within it that large, that generous, that magnanimous spirit, which looks far and wide throughout the world, and longs to spend and to be spent for the redemption of mankind.

And we have a duty to Christ, not less than to our Churches. He has placed on us the most solemn responsibilities. He has trusted us to carry on His work and be His witnesses. He is gone out of sight, and the world beholds Him no more. But the Church is His body. In us He would become incarnate. Through us He would speak to the world still, in its sorrow and in its need. "I go," He said, "My way to Him that sent Me, but I send you; and I count you faithful, appointing you to this service."

And is there any danger of His coming to us, as it were, in the intervals of His mysterious conflict with the powers of darkness, as He came to His disciples, upon whose sympathy in the hour of supreme crisis He reckoned in vain, and of His finding us and our Churches, as He found them, sleeping; insensible to the great appeal, regardless of an opportunity that can never return, dreaming a pleasant dream of earthly delight, or wrapped in heavy slumber, while His own soul is in travail? And is it possible that by-and-by He will come, when our chance is gone, and say to us, as He said to those disciples who had, at least, the willing spirit, though they were overcome by weariness and sorrow: "Sleep on now, and take your rest"?

To us, at least, as to them, a great opportunity

is given. Surely the harvest fields are white ; if we will but lift up our eyes to behold them ! The heart of India is looking wistfully to Christ ; and many of its people, who are trembling on the border of His Kingdom, are imploring our missionaries not to forsake them, and will hardly let them come home to tell us how the work is proceeding. In North China, I am told, there are those who have given up Buddhism and Taoism ; and they have nothing. Yes, they have something still. There is the deep instinct of religion. There is the Divine hunger. They have raised the altar to an unknown God, after whom they are feeling if haply they may find Him. For they have constituted themselves into a sect, which they call " the Sect without a name." Have we no opportunity there ? The history of New Guinea is just now beginning. The foundations of a State, that is to be, are being laid in that great island ; and many eyes are turning towards it. I read that two exploring expeditions, one organized by the Germans, another by Australians, are about to push into the interior. Is it not a critical time for that island ? and is not the voice from Heaven appealing to us to strengthen the hands of the heroic men who have been striving for the last dozen years to write the first pages of the history of New Guinea in the name and in the spirit of Christ ? It will not be strange if the historian of this century ranks the gathering of the great missionary societies in Central Africa as one of the most memorable events of the century—an event comparable only, perhaps, when regarded in the light of its momentous and far-reaching issues, to the

landing of the Pilgrim Fathers on the American shore. Another great continent is opening to our view. It is one to whom our society has at least a stronger claim than any other society who threw the door of that dark continent open. And is not the time critical in Central Africa? For us it is most critical. We ought to have forty men in Central Africa at least. We have *four*. Ten honoured graves, but four living men. If we become apathetic now, or lose heart, our footing there is gone. We must have all the faith and all the daring and all the chivalry of which we are capable, or there is fear of our slipping out of that splendid enterprise altogether, and having no part or lot in the matter.

The Directors tell us they have determined to ask boldly for an increase of £15,000 of additional income. I do not call that very astonishing boldness. I wish they had asked for £50,000! They know very well that they *want* it. They are too modest.

But it will not be easy to get even £15,000? I dare say not. But are we going to attempt nothing that cannot be done easily? Few things worth doing ever have been done easily, so far as I can make out. And it is strange that we should be anxious to do what we do for Christ easily. I should have thought we might have been willing to know something of the "fellowship of His sufferings."

We are jealous for the doctrine of the Atonement. We are saved, we say, by the mysterious merit of His sacrifice. But if we permit ourselves to be saved by the blood of the Cross, it might be expected that we should be willing to serve Him who suffered for us, without asking whether the thing can be done

easily or not. Shall I come to *His* table, and take the sacramental bread, and say : “ It is His body, broken for me,” and then proceed to say : “ But, as for Him, the crumbs which fall from *my* table, the odd shillings or sovereigns, that can be spared, the things that are left after all my own needs, present or future, have been met—these, *these*, shall be payment for Gethsemane, and requittal for the Cross.” The question is not : What will be easy ? but it is : What are we bound to do, by honour, and duty, and love ?

And we shall not, I say in conclusion, regret any hard work we do, or any sacrifice we make, for Christ and for His Kingdom. It will all come back to us. He that reapeth in God’s harvest receiveth wages ; and we shall be content when the wages are paid. I have often heard men regretting their purchases and their investments. I never heard any man regret what he did, or spared, or suffered, for Christ’s sake and the Gospel’s. These are not the things that men regret when the end of life is at hand and the time for retrospect is come, though there is too much often, then, which they do regret. I think we might well be content to “ share the travail which makes Christ’s Kingdom come.” I am certain that we shall be much more than *content* to share His joy and His triumphs at last.

IV.—THE WITNESS OF CONGREGATIONALISM ¹

THE subject that has been allotted to me is “The Witness of Congregationalism,” and I am invited to deal with this subject in such a way that my treatment of it may, by the blessing of God, become a step onwards towards that reunion which is, I trust, the ultimate goal of the desire of us all.

I take it, therefore, that my duty is to set forth with all possible clearness and brevity the distinctive principles held by Congregationalists, then to consider how far they correspond to the theory and practice of the Anglican Church, and finally to ask whether the correspondence is such as to justify any hope that these Communion, now separated, may, without sacrifice of principle or hurt to conscience, be included in the same Household and called by the same Name.

What then does Congregationalism stand for? In these days of general education, when the religious history of our country may be supposed to be diligently studied in our schools and colleges, it may seem to be superfluous, almost indeed an impertinence, to put such a question. But I cannot

¹ An address delivered at the Bristol Cathedral on Christmas Eve, 1922.

forget the saying of Archbishop Whately that "nothing is more unreasonable than to expect that people will know those things which they may reasonably be expected to know," and I am therefore encouraged to state my case simply in the hope that I may be forgiven by those with whom all that I have to say will be a familiar story.

To begin with, the early Congregationalists maintained that the Church consisted of the *people*, that it was not an idea in the abstract, not a system, not an institution, not a set of doctrines, not a polity, but a *society*, a fellowship of men and women bound together by certain common interests, a company of living, human souls, who of their own accord joined themselves together for one purpose. Their complaint was that Queen Elizabeth endeavoured by one blast of her trumpet to force all her people, good or bad, into one fold. They argued that a Church could not be created in that way. The "Lord's people," said Robert Browne, "is of the willing sorte." He denied the right of the Civil power to "compell religion." The Church, in his view, and that of those associated with him, was a purely voluntary society. Further, they held that this society, if it is to be a true Church, must be composed of Christian people. It is the saints who build up its fabric, not the saints in the sense of being persons of peculiar sanctity, but the saints in the New Testament sense, men and women, that is to say, who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, and whose mode of life and prevailing spirit are in harmony with their profession. It was the theory of Hooker "that there is not any

man a member of the Commonwealth which is not also a member of the Church of England.” That was an impossible theory to the Congregationalists. They would not even admit that every man who had been baptized in infancy was a member of the Church. They held that a man might have been duly baptized and yet have nothing in him, as he grew up, of the spirit of Jesus Christ, might, indeed, be even an unbeliever and a profligate. They spoke of “gathered Churches,” meaning Churches the members of which all shared in the same divine life, and were loyal to the same Lord. They did not, of course, profess to be able to look into the secrets of men’s hearts and to decide on every man’s spiritual standing in the sight of God. They made no such claim, but they did insist that avowed and consistent discipleship must be a condition of membership in the Church of Christ.

The true Church, however, thus composed was not without a Head. Its members were indeed brethren but they acknowledged one Lord and Master, their allegiance to whom was their common bond. They were not a democracy. They claimed no right to rule themselves. They were all alike subject to the rule of Christ. His Will was to be absolute with them all. And He was not only their one Lord, but He was their ever-present Lord. They took Him at His word when He said that wherever two or three of His disciples were gathered together in His Name there was He, and they believed that where He and His were thus together then all was present that was essential to the existence of a Church. Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, was

walking once with Dr. Abbott, of the City of London School, from the head of Ullswater up towards the foot of Grisedale Tarn. The two were discussing questions of ecclesiastical polity, and his companion asked him, Dale tells us, "with an expression of astonishment and incredulity whether I really thought that if the shepherds of Patterdale—a dozen or score of them—determined to constitute themselves a Congregational Church it was possible for such a Church to fulfil the purposes for which Churches exist. To such a question I replied there could be but one answer. Great natural sagacity, high intellectual culture, however admirable, are not essential. It is enough if when they meet they really meet in Christ's Name—but no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost."

There is, therefore, according to the Congregational idea, absolute spiritual equality in the Church. All are brethren and there is but one Master to whom each member is directly responsible, and with whom each one is in immediate and intimate spiritual contact. No third person may claim to come between the soul and its Saviour. The members may help one another and have need the one of the other, but the relations between them are personal rather than official, and the way by which each comes to God is through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ. Believing this, the Congregationalists have felt bound in conscience to resist any attempt to set a special class or order above the great Spiritual Commonalty. All are priests, all are prophets, or may be. The same

spirit is given to all, and the ruling power and seat of authority must be with the Congregation, as subject to the one Lord, and guided, taught, and inspired by the one Spirit.

This does not, of course, mean that all rules, offices, institutions, and organizations may be dispensed with. These have their place and use, and are necessary if there is to be orderly and reverent worship, and if the work of the Church is to be efficiently done. Henry Barrowe, a graduate of Clare College, Cambridge, who was hanged at Tyburn for his "schismatical and seditious opinions" in the year 1593, put his case thus: "It is manifest," he says, "that all the members of the Church have a like interest in Christ, in His Word, in the Faith; that they altogether make one bodie unto Him; that all the affairs of the Church belong to that bodie together. All the actions of the Church, as praiers, censures, sacraments, faith be the actions of them all jointly and of everie one of them severally; although the bodie unto diverse actions use such members as it knoweth most fit to the same." That is to say that though the Congregation is the ultimate authority, under Christ, it may if it choose appoint particular officers for particular functions. Its powers may be delegated, though not surrendered.

Nor is it meant that the individual Church must stand apart from other Churches. On the contrary, it may, as it has done, enter into fellowship with them, so that there may be a Community of Churches joined together for mutual help and common service, and officers may be appointed, as they have been

appointed, for all purposes of administration on behalf of this larger fellowship. We may have, therefore, as we have in fact to-day, an organization of considerable complexity, County Unions with their committees, their presidents, and other officers, and the aggregation of these local unions in the Congregational Union for the whole country. Still, the individual Church retains its spiritual independence. It may, and it usually does, come into line with its sister Churches, and submit to certain restrictions and regulations with a view to the promotion of the general welfare. But on the other hand it may, if it will, stand apart and still claim to be a Christian Church.

This, in brief, is what Congregationalism stood for in the beginning, and this is what it stands for to-day. No doubt there is more federation, more connexionalism, than in the earlier days. We have learned to care more for the corporate life. Recently, we have appointed Moderators for the nine provinces into which the country has been divided, and at first sight it may seem that the word Moderator is only another name for Bishop, though there is a difference. Then it is not customary now to inquire so carefully into the theological views of those who desire to join any Church as it used to be, or even to insist so rigidly on evidence of the deeper spiritual experiences. If men say that they believe in Jesus Christ, that they accept Him as Lord and Saviour and that their sincere desire is to live a consistent Christian life, that is generally regarded as sufficient unless there is definite ground for suspecting insincerity. Nor are we, I think,

quite so shy of the Civil power as our fathers were. We have less reason to be. Still, our ideal is essentially the same as theirs. Let me by way of summing up describe that ideal. The Church, in our conception of it, is this. It is a company of those who gather themselves together in the Name of Christ, and who verily believe that He is in the midst of them. That invisible but most real and glorious Presence invests with a holy mystery all the worship which they offer, and the work which they undertake, and the fellowship into which they have entered. In Christ they are one, and know and feel themselves to be one, and they love, honour, and serve one another as common disciples and friends of this same Master and Lord. The Society thus formed is a sacred home in which all the lonely and unhappy may meet with those to whom they are bound by the dearest spiritual ties. It is a fold within the shelter of which those who are exposed to grave perils may securely rest. It is a band of devoted labourers possessing various gifts but animated by the same spirit, and seeking the same ends, who strive to promote by all the means in their power the extension of the Kingdom of God within and beyond their own limits, both at home and abroad, to the utmost of their ability. It is a company of travellers journeying together and comforting and encouraging each other by the way, and hoping to reach at last the realms of eternal peace. These are among the elements that enter into our conception of the ideal Church. Every community thus formed is a family, and the universal Church is the aggregate and federation of such families wherever

they may be found through the whole world. That is our ideal—by no means made actual, as we must sorrowfully admit.

And now may I venture to ask, not without deference, and subject to correction from those who know the Anglican Church from within, whether, if we think of *facts* and *realities*, rather than of *words* and *labels*, there may not be far more correspondence both in theory and in practice in our day between these two systems than we have perhaps imagined. Are we in things essential so far apart? Does not the Anglican, not less than the Congregationalist, admit that it is the *people*, not any special order or hierarchy, that constitute the Church? I remember how that most learned and devout Churchman, Bishop Westcott, contended that the great commission, like the Pentecostal gift, is not for the Ministry, but for the *Church*, and how Bishop Lightfoot argued that every man has immediate access to God, and is directly responsible to Him. I remember also how the Visible Church is defined in the 19th Article as a Congregation of faithful men, and so far as I can learn this is the theory of the majority of Churchmen—that the Church is made up of *human beings*. And further, am I wrong in stating that the average Churchman does in theory maintain that the men who make up the Church are in the language of the Prayer Book *faithful* men? Is not that as much as to say that they must be genuine Christians, which was a fundamental principle of the early Congregationalists? They believed in “gathered Churches,” but is it not the view amongst Anglicans that to be a Church-

man in the fullest sense you must be confirmed, and does not the Prayer Book prescribe that none may be confirmed who do not "openly confess their Christian faith, and promise that by the grace of God they will evermore endeavour themselves faithfully to observe such things as they by their own confession have assented unto"? This does not, perhaps, quite agree with Hooker's idea of Churchmanship, but does it not mean very much what the Congregationalists meant?

Again, if I am not mistaken there is a tendency to-day among Anglicans, while duly recognising the Church as a whole, to attach also much importance to the particular congregation, to permit it to have a life and character and some considerable measure of independence of its own. Bishop Fraser, of Manchester, complained once that the Church was becoming too Congregational. To me as an outsider it does not appear that this tendency has at all been checked since this complaint was made. An eminent Churchman told me once he thought that vicars of parishes have things far too much their own way. That may be or may not be true, but when vicars and their congregations are in full agreement it has struck me that their Church has such an atmosphere of its own, such a family feeling, such common aims, tastes, traditions, sympathies among its members, as to bear a striking resemblance to the typical independent Church.

Such Churches, if I may dare to say so, seem to the superficial observer to insist on doing what they believe to be right in the sight of God in spite of rubrics, and even in spite of Episcopal admonitions.

Again, as to the relation of the Church to the Civil power. Here also is it not common for Anglicans to claim spiritual independence, even as Free Churchmen do? I do not think my High Church friends could put up with Queen Elizabeth's interference if she were on our English throne to-day. They would never allow her to tune her pulpits, which is what she liked to do in her time. Keble spoke of the Government of his day as a "ruffian band who came to reform where ne'er they came to pray." What would Queen Elizabeth have said to such language as that? It is only too likely that if Mr. Keble had flourished in the sixteenth century he would have been hanged at Tyburn for his seditious and schismatical opinions along with poor Henry Barrowe. Is it not the fact that Churchmen to-day, whatever may be their relation to the State, desire and claim in respect of all things spiritual to be *Free Churchmen* in a very real sense of the word? Have we not in this matter also come nearer together than we were?

But it may be urged that whatever agreement there may be between us there are two questions on which disagreement is so serious as to make reunion practically impossible.

The first is the question of Episcopacy.

You Congregationalists, it may be said, do not believe in government by bishops, and we do. How then can we be comprised in one body? I do not think this is by any means an insuperable difficulty. It depends on what kind of bishops is meant. A well-known clergyman, the Rev. H. A. Wilson, has said that "the origin and growth of

Dissent in the past has been very largely due to the fact that Episcopacy *in statu puro* had degenerated into Episcopacy *in statu corrupto*, and I note that the Lambeth authorities are speaking to-day of "Constitutional and representative Bishops." Such terms need perhaps a little further elucidation, but I cannot think that Congregationalists need have any serious quarrel with bishops that can be so described. They may even claim that they possess them themselves to their great advantage. And if it be said that the Anglican bishop has an authority over the individual Church or minister which the Congregational moderator disclaims and would be denied, the reply is—if I understand the matter rightly—that the Anglican bishop exercises his authority not as a despotic ruler, but rather as the duly appointed representative of the whole Church, and that the Congregational moderator, while disclaiming any authority over the individual Church in regard to its internal affairs, may speak and act with authority *in all that concerns its relations with the larger fellowship which he represents* in so far as he is assured of the concurrence and support of that larger fellowship. There is a difference, I admit, between the two offices, but not such a difference, I think, as is incapable of adjustment. After all, I suspect we are agreed that it is the bishop who is truly a "*father in God*," and who deals with his people as a father with his grown-up children, not so much by law as by kindness, by counsel, and persuasion, who most happily and usefully discharges the sacred duties that are laid upon him.

The other question is that of the meaning of the

Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. How can men be joined in one body who differ fundamentally on this subject? Here, again, I venture to ask "Why not?" if we all alike believe that it is by the same Divine grace that we are nourished and sanctified, by whatever channel it may be conveyed to us.

"Excellently well done was it," writes Dean Stanley, "that in the very heart of our most solemn service the two views"—he is referring to the contrasted views of Luther and Zwingli—"which have long divided the Christian Church should be represented side by side," to indicate, he means, that they are not incompatible with joint Christian Communion. And if this be the suggestion of the Prayer Book, so that Anglicans of either school of thought are encouraged to meet together for the showing forth of the Lord's death, as members of the same Body, there would seem to be no insuperable obstacle in the way of the participation of the Nonconformist, however strict his Protestantism may be, in the same fellowship, and in the same sacred act.

But if it be true that in regard to things essential in theory and in practice we are not so far apart as we had fancied, is anything to be gained by our drawing nearer still until we know and feel that we are indeed one? I think there is much to be gained. Will not that very knowledge and feeling that we are one, not in spirit only, but in body, be a gain? Is it no hurt to our sense of what is seemly that the family of Christ on earth should be broken up into sections separated from each other by partition walls? Will not the facility

for joint action in our Christian witness and warfare that will be secured by reunion be a gain? Will it be no gain when it is no longer possible for outsiders to say there are so many Churches at variance with one another that they cannot tell which to choose? Is there nothing to be gained by an undivided front? And there will be another gain of great value. When each Church stands by itself to witness to its own distinctive principles and guard its own particular contribution to the Church as a whole, there is serious danger that such emphasis may be laid on those distinctive principles and that particular contribution as to cause indifference to other elements represented by other Communion, and that may mean grievous impoverishment and loss. All things are ours, whether Anglicanism, or Presbyterianism, or Methodism, or Congregationalism. All things are ours. But we are apt to lose our sense of the whole if we fix our attention unduly on a part. What then hinders our becoming one united and comprehensive Church? There are, of course, many practical difficulties that cannot be disposed of without much patient consideration. But there is one hindrance that we may all help to put out of the way. It is the memory of old enmities, the hold upon us of inherited prejudices, the lingering echoes which haunt us still of "old, far-off, unhappy things, and battles long ago." We must refuse to be hampered in the present and in the future by the dim remembrance of ancient feuds. In God's Name let bygones be bygones in so far as they disqualify us for the duties and opportunities of to-day. The hour is surely auspicious for an

honest and resolute effort to forget and to forgive. To-day, in all our Churches, we are invited in a joint appeal from the two Archbishops and the leaders of the Free Churches to pray together for the peace of the World, "that we may be forgiven all that God has seen in us of selfishness and pride, that there may be removed far from us the tempers which provoke the spirit of strife and that there may be granted to us such a measure of the gentleness and patience of His Son that we may live peaceably with all men, and be by God's blessing the makers of peace." It is International peace, the Federation of the *World*, that is chiefly contemplated in this form of prayer which is commended to us all. But gathered here on this Christmas Eve we cannot forget how He who is our Peace came and lived and died that He might break down the middle walls of partition between us, and bring us all in one spirit unto the Father. That means religious peace. It means also the Federation of the Church. And we may well pray this solemn night that we may be free from any prejudice and spirit of aloofness which may hinder such a consummation.

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long :
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad :
The nights are wholesome ; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

It is indeed a time for the bringing together of those that have been scattered and the reconciliation of those that have been driven apart.

May I be pardoned if I say in conclusion one personal word.

While I cannot imagine myself consenting to abandon those simple and homely religious forms and usages in the practice of which I was brought up, and which I love and value, not only for old association's sake, but because of their very simplicity and homeliness, yet I trust I am not the less able to respect and to appreciate those forms and usages which are equally dear to my brethren of the Anglican Church, and I confess I have often wished that as I share, as I humbly believe, with those honoured brethren in the membership of the Mystical Body of Christ, in the Common Salvation which is through Him, and in the blessed hope of the Gospel, so the time might come when I could share also with them, in the membership of one Visible Church, the home and embodiment on the earth of our one Lord and Redeemer.

It may be that no change in the situation may take place in my time, but standing here to-day in this historic building, the mother Church of my native city, through the kindness and courtesy of those that are in authority, I will say that had I been a younger man I should have looked forward with the keenest pleasure, and not without some confidence, to a happy day when I should worship within these venerable walls as one rejoicing in his own inheritance—

No more a stranger and a guest
But as a child at home.

V.—THE POWER OF PRAYER ¹

ONE might think that being Christian people and believing what Christian people are understood to believe, we should find the greatest comfort and joy in the act and habit of prayer. For consider what it is that we Christian people profess to believe about God and God's relations with mankind. We believe, do we not, that God is good, that He is merciful, that He is our Father, that He has given us in Jesus Christ a revelation of His nature and disposition towards us, and the clearest possible evidence of His desire to help and to save us. We believe, also, that He is with us everywhere, able to hear us when we cry, and to succour us in our need. That is our belief, stated in a very broad and simple way. It is the common faith of the Christian Church in all its sections.

But would you not suppose that people believing such things about God, believing in that Fatherly mercy, and in that all-pervading Presence, would find their greatest happiness in prayer? Would you not suppose that in all their sorrow, and fear,

¹ An address delivered at Hampstead Town Hall, on Tuesday, March 23, 1909, at the request of a Joint Committee of Hampstead Clergy and Nonconformist Ministers.

and loneliness, they would turn to that Almighty and most kind Friend with the greatest eagerness, and that they would find in communion with Him relief from care and trouble, and a deep and holy peace? That is what you would expect.

And, indeed, this is what prayer seems to have meant to many persons, and does, no doubt, mean to many to-day. Apparently it is what it meant to many in Old Testament times who had not that fuller knowledge of God which we think has come to us in the Gospel. We know how sad and forlorn many of these Old Testament saints felt when they seemed to be shut off from the Divine Presence, how they thirsted after that Presence as the hart for the water brooks, how they beguiled the way, as they journeyed up to Jerusalem, with the thought of that blissful hour when they would appear before God in Zion, how the anticipation of that hour transfigured the whole country through which they passed, so that the Vale of Weeping was filled as with a sound of bubbling streams, and how, when the Holy Place was reached at last, their cup of happiness was full. Then was there gladness in their hearts more than in the time when the corn and the wine increased. In His Presence was fulness of joy.

And if we turn to the New Testament we find that evidences are not wanting of the power of prayer. We know something of what it meant to our Lord Himself. We know how He would rise a great while before day that He might be alone with God; how, sometimes, He would remain all night in prayer, how His disciples were

so impressed by its effect upon Him that they begged Him to let them know His secret ; how once when He was praying His face was transfigured, and all the sad and terrible future that was before Him was lit up with a Divine glory.

We know, too, that the Apostles had similar experiences. We remember, for instance, how St. Paul, though the particular thing for which he prayed was not granted, had yet such a vision of the unseen, and heard such gracious words that he was able even to glory in the infirmity which before had been almost more than his patience could endure. Nor do such experiences belong only to the Apostolic age. No lines are more familiar to us than those in which Archbishop Trench speaks of the " change within us which one short hour spent in God's Presence will avail to make."

He writes :—

We kneel, and all around us seems to lower,
We rise, and all, the distant, and the near,
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear.

And he wonders :—

That we should ever weak and heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee.

He, too, it would seem, had known something of the transfiguring power of prayer.

But it is to be feared that there are many nowadays who cannot use such language and bear such witness. There is in them the instinct to pray. There is the

hunger after God, the longing for peace, confidence, vision. But the hunger is not satisfied. They ask, but nothing is given. They seek, but do not find. They knock, loudly, importunately, almost angrily, but no door is opened to them. There is nothing but a stony silence. There is nothing to see, nothing to hear. It seems to be no good praying.

When Cicero was in Thessalonica, an exile from Rome, he looked up to the heights of Olympus, where the imagination of the early Greeks had seen the shining palaces of the Gods. "But I," he says, "saw nothing but snow and ice." It is even so with some in our modern time. They look up, but there is no Heavenly Jerusalem, no City of the living God, no Father waiting there to listen to the cry of His children, and to come down for their help. Heaven has vanished like a dream. They see nothing but blind force, inexorable law, nothing but snow and ice.

Now why is this? Why cannot we pray as others have prayed, and find what they have found, to their infinite comfort? Is it possible that our disappointment and failure may be due to a lack of patience? Is it the case that we cannot, or will not, wait until there comes such a composure of mind and freedom from distraction as are essential if we would hear, and understand, what God may have to say to us? In one of Jeremy Taylor's sermons on the "Returns of Prayer," he tells us that "prayer is the issue of a quiet mind, of untroubled thoughts, and that he that prays to God with an angry, that is," he explains, "with a troubled

and discomposed spirit, is like one who sets up his closet in the out-quarters of an army and chooses a frontier garrison to be wise in. For so," he continues, in an exquisite passage which I may be permitted to quote, "so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass and soaring upwards, singing as he rises and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of its wings; till the little creature was forced to sit down, and pant, and stay till the storm was over; and then it made a prosperous flight and did rise and sing as if it had learned music and motion from an angel as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below: so is the prayer of a good man when his prayer was broken, and his thoughts were troubled, and his words went up towards a cloud, and his thoughts pulled them back again, and made them without intention, and the good man sighs for his infirmity, but must be content to lose the prayer, and he must recover it when his anger is removed and his spirit is becalmed, made even as the brow of Jesus, and smooth like the heart of God; and then it ascends to heaven upon the wings of the holy dove, and dwells with God, till it returns like the useful bee, laden with a blessing, and the dew of heaven."

There, it may be, is the secret of much fruitless prayer. Those "loud sighings of an eastern wind" disturb and harass the soul. We are

preoccupied. The cares of the world weigh upon us. The noise of controversy is in our ears. We are, as it were, on a battlefield, and the air is thick with smoke, so that the clear sky is hidden from us. The very vehemence of our desire and the loud clamour of our crying, may drown the still small voice which would be audible if our mood were more tranquil, or we had patience to wait until the noise about us sank into silence, and the inward tumult were hushed. It is because the world is too much with us that we fail to get those glimpses of a glory that would make us less forlorn.

But if that is one explanation of the failure of our attempt to pray, it is not the only explanation. I cannot but think that one great difficulty is in the fact that we have not such a conception of God as would enable us to speak to Him with any satisfaction. He is not real to us as our human friends are real. We can get no clear thought in our minds of what He is like. He is but a Name, and a Name that stands for something vast, shadowy, unsubstantial. If we could think of Him as the patriarchs did we could pray to Him more easily. But there is no picture of Him which the imagination can shape, no point of contact between ourselves and Him. And we understand too well the despairing lament of Job, who felt that the Eternal Power was eluding him, and who grasped nothing but thin air when he stretched out his hand in futile entreaty.

How, then, are we to conceive of God if we are to pray to Him with any sense of reality? In the first place, we must think of Him as being in some sense separate from ourselves. If we regard Him

simply as the sum of all things there can never be the kind of communion we desire. There may be a certain cosmic emotion as we contemplate the universe and realize that we are parts of one stupendous whole. But that vague cosmic emotion is not what we mean by prayer. No, however intimately and vitally we may believe God to be associated with us we must think of Him as being in a manner external to us if we are to commune with Him. It may be a hard task for our rigorous logic to understand how He can be infinite and at the same time external to any of His creatures. But we do not well to submit too unreservedly to the tyranny of a logic like this. It is better to give up speaking and thinking of God as infinite than to give up praying to Him. Indeed, Professor William James has advised us frankly to do this. "The line of least resistance," he says, "as it seems to me both in theology and in philosophy, is to accept, along with the superhuman consciousness, the notion that it is not all-embracing—the notion, in other words, that there is a God, but that He is finite, either in power, or in knowledge, or in both at once." And he claims that "these are the terms in which common men have usually carried on their commerce with God, and that the monistic perfections that make the notion of Him so paradoxical, practically and morally, are the colder additions of remote professorial minds operating *in distans* upon conceptual substitutes for Him alone."

That may seem a little startling, and we shall prefer, perhaps, to leave the mystery, in so far as it is a mystery, unsolved.

Or we shall be content to put the matter as Browning does :—

You know what I mean, God's all, man's nought ;
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, a handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use His gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever,
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, " But all is God's "—whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, His own word saith, to grieve Him,
But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise or prayer.

We must think of God, then, as one who is, by His own act and will, external to the creatures whom He has made in His own image. Prayer is out of the question for the consistent pantheist. We must look at God from that " place apart " if He is to be a reality to us. We must believe that He has given us a life and a will of our own, and that we may seek Him, or refuse to seek Him, as we choose.

But here another difficulty will present itself. If we are in a " place apart " we may easily come to think that it is a place so far apart as to make all access to Him, and communion with Him, impossible. If He is in Heaven—whatever precise meaning we may attach to that term—if He is in Heaven,

and we on the earth, how can we approach Him, how come into contact with Him? There would seem to be a great gulf fixed between the Creator and His creatures, and how is it to be bridged?

Well, I believe the best way out of this difficulty is to be found in the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. I am afraid that doctrine has not been very helpful to some people. In some cases, perhaps, it has brought confusion, rather than help to the mind. What need is there, it has been asked, of the mediation of this mysterious Third Person of the Trinity? The idea of the Father is one that we can grasp, in a measure, at least, but the Spirit! What is the Spirit? Now, it is a very sorrowful thing if anything like this has resulted from our Lord's teaching about the Holy Spirit. For, assuredly, He did not wish to confuse the minds of His disciples, or to strain their faith unduly, when He spoke to them of the Spirit who should be with them, and should be their Teacher and Helper. He wished to comfort them rather. His purpose was of a most practical kind. Consider what the situation was. These men had, I suppose, very simple views about God. They thought of Him as being somewhere far away enthroned above the stars, dwelling in inaccessible light. Jesus had, however, made Him seem strangely near to them. But now Jesus was going away. He was to return to the Father. And what then would happen to them? Would they not be left like orphans in this forsaken world? It seemed so. And there came over them a desolate feeling at the prospect of being thus abandoned. And He would make it

clear to them that they were not going to be abandoned. "I will not leave you orphans," He said. And He talked to them of this Spirit who should be in the world when His own personal presence was withdrawn. I do not think He meant them to perplex their minds with abstruse questions of personality, or any other profound theological problems. But He wanted them to know that there would be always with them a Presence and a Power who should be to them what He Himself had been through those brief years of happy companionship, and who should be to them even as God, the Spirit of both the Father and the Son.

And though the faith of the Church has not always been very consistent or vigorous, yet it has always maintained that the world is full of God. That Divine Spirit

Fills the Church of God, He fills
The sinful world around.

We are not parts of God, but there is no man anywhere who is not in contact with His Spirit. He is not far from any one of us.

Now, if that be so, do we not see what prayer must be in its essence? It is just the turning of our own spirit to that Divine Spirit by whom we are beset, behind and before. It is the act of receiving whatever influences may flow into us from that all-pervading source of light and power. It is the recognition by faith that God is there, by our side and within us. The author of *The Solitary Summer* tells us that her children, so far as she could make out, believe that the Being they

called "Lieber Gott" pervaded the garden, and was identical with the sunshine and the air on a fine day. And she says that if on bright mornings she forgot to open immediately all the library windows on coming down, one of them would run in and with quite a worried look on her face, would cry, "Mummy, won't you open the windows and let the 'Lieber Gott' come in?"

Is it not something like that when we pray? What Keble calls the "stubborn heart and will, in which no place is found" for God's Spirit, are made sorry for their obstinacy, and repent. The windows are thrown open that the "dear God" may come in. And He comes in, as the sunshine and the air will stream into a chamber when the window is open on some sweet May morning.

But if Prayer is to bring us all the help and the comfort it is capable of affording, it is not enough for us to believe in that universal spirit, and to put ourselves in contact with it. We need to know more particularly what manner of spirit it is. The personal element is needed, the character, which counts for so much in all our relations with our fellow-men with whom we have any happy intercourse.

There is a characteristic passage in Wordsworth's lines on revisiting Tintern Abbey, in which he speaks of having had a sense

Of something . . .

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

That is a great experience which is described in those famous lines, but the sense of that "something" which "rolls through all things" is not exactly prayer, as we understand prayer. A "sense of something," but what is that "something," that nameless energy? Is there any intelligence in it? Is it a spirit that knows anything, and cares about us, or cares about anything? How vague it all is! Coleridge comes a little nearer to what we mean when he tells us that it has not been his "use to pray with moving lips or bended knees,"

But silently, by slow degrees,
My spirit I to love compose,
In humble trust mine eyelids close
With reverential resignation;
No wish conceived, no thought expressed,
Only a sense of supplication—
A sense o'er all my soul impressed
That I am weak, but not unblest,
Since in me, round me, everywhere,
Eternal strength and wisdom are.

That is beautiful, and there is more of the essence of true prayer in it than in Wordsworth's communion with Nature. For it is much to feel, however dimly, that that Power which rolls through all things means well to us frail mortals.

But do we not crave something more definite, more personal? I am sure most of us do, and I thank God that something much more definite and personal is provided for us in the Gospel. For one fundamental thing in the Gospel is the revelation which it contains of the will and character of God, in the person of Jesus Christ. Remember what is

said of Christ. He is, we are told, the "Image of the invisible God." God has in these last days spoken to us "in a Son who is the shining forth of His glory, and the very Image of His substance." And again, "It is God who said: 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." There is a world of meaning in those words. Here is God defined, limited, made visible, audible to us, brought home to us, clothed in our own familiar humanity, wearing a garment with a hem that we can recognize, embodied in a character that we can appreciate and love, with a personality distinct, and endeared to us by a most winning sweetness, while its majesty commands our profound veneration. It is not, therefore, merely a sense of something vast and mysterious, some mighty supernatural power, of which we are aware when we pray. Our communion is rather with a human friend in whom God is present and manifest, a Man who understands us, and whom we can understand, but in whom we have knowledge of the Eternal and fellowship with Him. It is surely one great purpose of the Incarnation that we should thus know the Father, and be able to speak to Him as children do to their parents.

Now, if such fellowship with God in Christ is possible, there are one or two things that may be said about it with profit before proceeding farther. There is this to be said, for instance. If it be possible, then how sacred, how imperative a duty it must be. If there be a Divine Father who has spoken to us, and is now calling to us, through His

Son, how hard it must be to find excuse for our conduct if we are keeping aloof, and treating His appeals and offers with indifference or scorn, as if some child, busy with its toys, or some older child, engrossed in his own pursuits, should refuse to give any thought or care to the father and mother to whom it owed an immeasurable debt. We may not wish to regard prayer as a matter of legal obligation, but at least there should be the constraining power of honour and affection. There is no domestic duty so sacred as the duty we owe to God, if He is truly both the Father and Eternal Home of our spirits.

Nor can we wonder, if prayer means anything like this, that men should find in the practice of it so much joy and peace as many have found. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." How could it be otherwise? The supreme joy of life is in the company of our dearest friends, and in communion with them, and if there is such a thing as seeing the Lord with the spiritual eye I cannot imagine any greater happiness that we can desire. There is a passage in Marcus Aurelius in which he chides men for wishing to go into solitude into the country, when they should be able to retire into themselves. But unfortunately it is not always a very peaceful place that you come into when you try thus to retire into yourself. A better thing by far, if it can be done, is to forget oneself and rest in the presence of God. "How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God, therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings."

And what can be said of the healing and uplifting power of that communion? It is said that the face of Moses shone when he came down from the Mount. That is not surprising. There is nothing that redeems and sanctifies a man more surely than the power of personal influence, and there is no personal influence so searching, and so transfiguring, as that which the Son of Man exerts on those who become his companions. The work that we do may easily come to nothing, but we ourselves shall count for much in the world if we have been often in the presence of Christ, and have been touched and penetrated by His Spirit. After all, the most useful people, in the highest ways, are those who have something of that prophetic power which comes from the vision of God.

But now, having spoken of the essential character of prayer, I wish to give a little attention to certain difficulties in regard to one particular form, or mode, which it tends to assume.

Prayer is in essence, we have seen, the turning of the soul to God, the conscious meeting with Him in a spirit of reverence and trust. It may find expression in articulate words, in the exquisite phrases, it may be, of some venerable liturgy, or there may be nothing audible but a sigh, nothing visible but the falling of a tear. The essential thing is that we come face to face with God. But suppose we have thus come, or believe that we have, into His presence, there are then many things that it would seem natural for us to ask at His hands. And the question arises whether it is right and profitable for us to do this, whether we can obtain anything

by praying, apart from the value that may belong to the act of prayer as a spiritual exercise. In other words, is petition a legitimate and useful element in our communion with God ?

Now, it may be observed that if God is what the Christian Faith declares Him to be, it must be impossible for any man to draw near to Him in a humble and receptive frame of mind without obtaining something, and something of supreme value. Men talk of what they call the subjective value of prayer, meaning some value involved in the very act without reference to any gift that may come from without. But no true prayer can be subjective only in this sense. For communion with God means much more than communion with the spirit of Nature. We may indeed find it greatly to our advantage to commune with Nature as we all have done in a measure. We may be aware of a soothing influence that steals over us as we withdraw from the business and tumult of the world to the forest, or the seashore, or wander alone beneath the stars. Nature has many gracious ministries of this kind to offer, and those are wise who know how to avail themselves of such timely help.

But though in a figure of speech we may personify Nature, we do not think that she is really concerned to help us, and is waiting to bestow upon us her benedictions. We come to her when our minds are restless and troubled, and we find some healing, as we may do when we turn over the familiar pages of some great thinker of a bygone time. But in both cases the help comes to us not with any intention on the part of its source. It comes in a mechanical

way, or at least by the operation of some natural law. It is *we* who by our own act make use of some fact or some idea which we find to be profitable. But it is otherwise with this Spirit of God by which we are encompassed. That Spirit is not something indifferent, neutral, unconcerned for our trouble, and unaware of any help that it may bring to us in our need. It is a Being rather who *is* concerned about us, and has an intelligent purpose to befriend us. It is near to us, and about us, not as the air which plays around our dwelling, and will come in if any avenue is open to it, by virtue of a necessity of its own nature. Rather it may be compared to some would-be benefactor who waits at the door and knocks, desiring to comfort our loneliness, and supply our need. There is thus an essential difference between that spirit which rolls through all things, the impersonal spirit of the universe, which neither knows nor cares whether we are aware of it, or moved by it, or not, and the Spirit of which the New Testament speaks, which pities, and yearns over, and seeks to bless those whom it visits, and is grieved when it is ignored or rejected. To come into contact with God through His Spirit is to come into contact with a Power that is actively on our side, a Power whose desire and mission it is to help us. Clearly, therefore, we cannot pray, in the sense of opening the heart to the operation of this Power, without obtaining something. We receive God Himself, and there is nothing greater that we can receive. And it may be that when the sense of being in His presence, and in contact with Him, is especially vivid, we shall not think of asking anything of His

mercy except perhaps that the beatific vision may not pass away. It is enough to know that He is there, and that He has told us His name. "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments," cried Job. But it is possible that if he had come "even to God's seat" he could only have bowed his head in silence. Indeed, later on, he said: "Now mine eye seeth Thee, therefore," as the marginal reading has it, "I loathe my words, and repent in dust and ashes."

For most of us, however, at ordinary times, there are things that we are instinctively moved to ask for. Concerning some of these things we may not be quite sure that it would be good for us to obtain them. But we do desire them very earnestly, and we would fain persuade ourselves that we should be much happier and better if we had them. And there are other things we need, and desire, as to the true value of which we cannot entertain any doubt.

Very well then, here we are in poverty, or pain, or sorrow, anxious about many things in the home, in the Church, in the life of the State, in the condition of the world, not to speak of our personal needs; here we are, anxious and longing to get relief from our anxiety, and we are in the presence of God, who is the Almighty, who is our Father, who is our best Friend, as we are told, able, and surely willing to give us all things that are good. Why then should we not ask Him for these good things? It seems a natural and inevitable thing to do. And, further, it is a thing that we are encouraged and invited to do. Invitations to such

prayer abound in the New Testament, and promises that it shall be heard and answered. There is the need, there is the instinct—there are the promises. Why, then, should we not pray for this thing or the other, which we desire ?

Well, in spite of the instinct, and in spite of the promise, many seem to have come to think that there is really not much use or reason in any prayer that is anything but acquiescence or meditation, and probably not a few have given up the practice altogether. There is need to use our wits, they will say, there is need to labour, there is need to consult books and human friends. By all these means results may be obtained, and they may be employed with advantage. But we shall not get any good thing, either for ourselves or for our friends, just by asking for it.

That is what some are saying, or feeling, if they will not say it in words. And they have come to this conclusion through the pressure of two considerations which have had more weight with them, I think, than they have deserved.

There has been the notion, first, that all things, at least in the material sphere, are under the dominion of law, fixed and unalterable, so that nothing can be done in answer to prayer without interfering with the prevailing order, and producing confusion and uncertainty ; and, secondly, there has been the thought that, even though the order of Nature might be broken in upon by Divine interposition, it would still be a mistake to pray for such interferences, inasmuch as it would involve a want of confidence in God's providential rule of the world. Is He

not at the helm? Does He not know what He is about? and what is best for us, and best for the world at large? Does He not see things on a wider scale than we can, and does He not see the end from the beginning? and why, then, should we not leave the world's affairs, and our own personal affairs, in His wise and beneficent hands, and let Him work out His own purposes in His own way, without any foolish clamour or short-sighted suggestions on our part?

That is how some really devout-minded people seem to be feeling. But though such views are plausible enough, yet a little reflection may make it clear to us that they are not so sound as may appear. As to the reign of law, for instance, on which so much stress has been laid. There is, of course, such a reign. There is a natural order. But, after all, what is law? Miracles, we are told, do not happen. Perhaps not. But what is a miracle? These are difficult questions, which in some of their aspects still await solution. But one thing will be admitted by all who know anything of the present situation. It will be admitted that the tone in which it was customary to speak on these matters a generation ago was too confident and dogmatic. We have been brought, in our day, to a humbler mood. We are more aware than we used to be, when some of us were young men, of our limitations, and of the mystery in which the world we live in, and of which we form a part, is shrouded. We have discovered that we know less than we thought we knew. We spoke of the potency of matter, but now we are more inclined to

ask whether we know anything at all about matter, or whether there is such a thing. What strikes us as we look abroad is that there seems to be a ceaseless play of forces, which we call natural forces, operating in obedience to unchanging laws and subject to one supreme controlling energy by which, or by whom, all are bound into one great unity. But we observe also that, associated in some intimate and mysterious way with this natural order, there is another order, exhibiting a ceaseless movement of forces which we describe as spiritual, consisting of thoughts, emotions, desires, volitions, which act upon the natural forces, and are acted upon by them, though by what means or in what precise manner no man can tell. A thought will come into the mind. It is related, we are assured, to some modification of the substance of the brain, though no one can say what the relation is. And it produces certain physical results. It causes the blood to run more quickly. The cheek is red with blushes. Nerves, muscles, bones, are all brought into action. But what kind of bridge it is that connects these mechanical movements with that thought, that emotion, which seems to belong to a quite different order of things, is beyond our power to determine. We only know that the astonishing thing—the miracle, for it is a kind of miracle—happens. And we know that such miracles are happening every moment, without any mischievous results. The spiritual is ever flowing in upon the material, and the material upon the spiritual, so that the line of demarcation is hard to discern, and is indeed denied to exist by those who contend, on

the one hand, that all is material, or, on the other, that all is spiritual. The natural order is fixed. But we are continually breaking in upon it, every one of us. There is not a conscious moment in which you are not, by some act of will, introducing some new modifying or counteracting cause into the existing system. You have no conception how you do it; but the thing is done. But why should we suppose that it is man only who can act in this way? How do we know that the human will is the only kind of will that is at work in this complex universe? "The will of each individual," writes Professor Percy Gardner, "is hemmed in, on the one side by the conditions of the physical universe, on the other by a countless multitude of other wills, the wills of our fellow-men, with which we have continually to make terms, and which are ever thwarting our purposes and disregarding our wishes. And beyond all these wills of myself and others there is a greater Power than ours, a force which in magnitude and in wisdom passes our utmost thought and imagination, and which lies behind the facts of external nature, which lies behind the activities and purposes of our fellow-creatures, which lies at the roots of our own being." Is that so? Is there an Almighty Power which lies behind all the facts of Nature, and all the activities of our fellow-creatures, and at the roots of our own being? And if there be such a Power, is it beyond His province and capacity to modify the conditions of the world which He has called into existence, by the agency of other wills unknown to us, or by the direct action of His own will? Can you not conceive of that being done

without confusion and catastrophe being the result ? Sir Oliver Lodge complains that " religious people seem to think it scientific not to pray, in the sense of simple petition," but he maintains " that so far as ordinary science has anything to say to the contrary, a more childlike attitude might turn out to be a truer one, and more in accordance with the total scheme. Prayer for breach of law would be," he urges, " not only foolish, but profane ; but who are we to dogmatize too positively concerning law ? Prayer, we are told, is a mighty engine of achievement " (I am still quoting Sir Oliver), " but we have ceased to believe it. Why should we be so incredulous ? " That is a somewhat novel question for an eminent representative of science to put to religious people : " Why are you so incredulous ? " Why are you so credulous ? it used to be said. And if science, in such a case as this, commends the childlike attitude, it should not be hard for us, with this deep instinct rooted in our nature, and burdened as we are with many needs and sorrows, frankly and honestly to accept it.

But if we did accept it, there would still be the other difficulty. Does not God know what is best, we might say, and will He not do what is best for us and the world, without any reminders or entreaties on our part ? Now that argument has a pious sound, and I would not suggest that it may not be urged in good faith. But obviously it proves too much, for it will apply to our actions as much as to our prayers. However responsible God may be for the government of the world, and however beneficent His purpose may be, He certainly does not fulfil

all that purpose apart from human effort. We love to think that He cares for our children, as much as we do, but, none the less, those children will suffer in mind, or body, or both, if we neglect them. Their well-being depends upon us, and if we fail in our duty we do not expect that they will be saved from the consequences. That is according to an ordinance of God with which we should feel it to be foolish to quarrel. And what if it should be also according to His ordinance that they, and others, should be dependent on those spiritual efforts which are involved in every true act of prayer? Our Lord seemed to intimate that this may be the case when He bids His disciples pray the Lord of the harvest that He may send forth labourers into the harvest, as if the Divine action were conditioned by man's indolence or indifference. That may seem a hard condition, but is it harder in the case of prayer than in the case of action? And if we shrink from the responsibility which seems to be thus laid upon us, we may remember that another word for responsibility is opportunity, and if there is really any availing power in intercession, an opportunity of inestimable value is placed in our hands of serving those whom we could not perhaps serve in any other way. There is nothing that the man who has in him any trace of the mind of Christ will care for so much as to be of use, and to what great use our lives may be put if we can set in motion spiritual forces, which may be as the waves of some healing river that brings joy and benediction to all to whom it comes.

I think, therefore, we shall be wise if we refuse to let our prayers be hindered by any perplexities

by which our poor minds may be troubled. In one of those Bible stories which charmed our childhood we read how Daniel was wont to keep open the window in his chamber which looked towards Jerusalem. Jerusalem was out of sight, five hundred miles away across the great Assyrian plain, but there it was, his mother city, and the habitation of God, in the far distance. And he would not forget it. For us, too, there is a Jerusalem which is perhaps not so far away, a city of the living God, and in this world, with all its distractions and perils, subject as we are to many temptations, and apt to lose much that is best worth cherishing, it is good for us to keep open the window that looks to the dwelling-place of the Eternal. We shall sink low indeed if that glorious vision fades away and disappears, as it too easily may do.

If in time of sacred youth,
We learned at home to love and pray,
Pray heaven that early love and truth
May never wholly pass away.

Moreover, in this attitude and exercise of prayer we find ourselves drawn strangely to each other. We may differ on points of doctrine or of polity. We may put different interpretations on the Christian sacraments. And it may seem impossible that we should ever agree. But those who draw near through Jesus Christ in one spirit to the Father will find that those middle walls of partition, which no ingenuity could surmount, have melted away, and that they and their fellow-worshippers are brethren indeed, reconciled and made one by a common

experience of unspeakable solemnity. Walking in that Light we have fellowship one with another. We cannot wrangle in that august and glorious company. If to pray be to lie open to the entrance of the Spirit it will not be long before that Spirit, establishing itself within us, will begin to bear its wholesome fruit ; and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace.

Here, then, is a consummation to the perfecting of which our endeavours may most fitly and worthily be consecrated. There are questions of history, of criticism, of polity, of doctrine, which cannot be settled in a day, and which may not be settled for generations, which, possibly, indeed, may never be settled in this world. But is there any reason why those who believe in Christ should not take His name upon their lips and enter together, as His disciples, into the Holy Place ?

So we may hope that all the old enmities will at last be destroyed, and the discordant note that has vexed so long the peace of mankind resolved into a majestic harmony, and that the life that men live upon this earth, once the scene of so much bitterness and strife, shall bear upon it the seal and superscription of Heaven itself, with nothing to mar its beauty or hinder its joy, as it were

One great eternal story,
A poem spread abroad ;
And the sun of all their glory
The countenance of God,

VI.—WHAT ISRAEL OUGHT TO DO ¹

And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do.—I CHRON. xii. 32.

YOU have a list in this chapter of the bands of warriors, representing different tribes, who came to crown David King of all Israel at Hebron. Many of these are described as being mighty men of valour. They were all, indeed, it is said, men of war who could keep rank. They were brave men and trained soldiers, and formed into one body they made up an imposing military force.

But a nation needs statesmen as well as generals, men of political sagacity, as well as mighty men of valour, men of judgment and foresight who can wisely conduct its policy, as well as men expert at arms who can fight its battles. Such men Israel seems to have found in the children of Issachar. They were men who saw what was wanted. They grasped the situation. They had understanding of the times, and knew what Israel ought to do.

By "Israel" I wish to denote this morning the Israel with which the majority of us are most directly concerned—that section, I mean, of the Church of our time which comprises the Nonconformist com-

¹ A sermon preached in the Chapel of Mansfield College, Oxford, on Sunday, November 29, 1889.

munities. Of the Free Churches of England, we may say that they are "our Israel." And, though I do not for a moment claim to be regarded as a child of Issachar, I am anxious that we should consider together to-day what, in view of the circumstances of the present hour, and looking to possible developments in the future, it seems to be desirable that we of the Free Churches should aim at and labour for. What ought we to do? What should we strive to be? What are the things of which we stand urgently in need?

It is but a modest contribution I can venture to offer to the discussion of a large and many-sided question, but you will bear with me while I throw out a few suggestions.

I. One thing of obvious importance is that we should endeavour to get, and to hold, and to keep prominently before the public mind, conceptions of a distinctly positive character in respect of Christian truth, of principle, and of polity. What are we? We are Protestants. We are Dissenters. We are Nonconformists. Thus it is that we are described. And there is not one of these names of which we have any cause at all to be ashamed. It may be doubted whether there ever was a truly great man who was not in some sense a Nonconformist. Certainly there is no single member of the noble army of martyrs who was not both a Protestant and a Dissenter, whose very martyrdom was not a protest against, and a dissent from, the existing order. We may acknowledge our Nonconformity without a blush. Indeed, this world being what it is, one feels that the man who never says a word, or does an

action, by which he may earn the name Nonconformist, must be one of the feeblest of his kind. At the same time, it must be owned that refusals and negations are but meagre fare to live upon. Cardinal Newman has told us that he disliked the word "Protestant" because "it did not denote the profession of any particular religion at all, and was compatible with infidelity." He tells us also how impossible he felt it to be to withstand the liberalism of the day by mere negations, and how necessary it seemed to him to have a positive Church Theory, erected on a definite basis; and how this took him to the great Anglican divines. To a certain extent we may sympathize with such feelings. There is, indeed, no sufficient ground for our regarding the word "Protestant" with actual dislike, for it is a good enough word so far as it goes, but we may justly admit its inadequacy to give an account of our whole position. And though we may not think that our wisest or safest course, in our search after positive and definite theories, is to betake ourselves to the great Anglican divines, even to the greatest of them; though we may claim that we have a right, and that it is our duty, to go much farther back and to a much higher source; though we may prefer to choose for our authorities Christ Himself and His Apostles, and the New Testament for our guide-book, still we may acknowledge the importance, and the necessity, of being able to say, not simply, "I dissent from this," or "I do not believe in that," but "this is the truth, this is the polity, these are the principles, in which I do believe." Look at the question of doctrine. One needs to

understand the times but very imperfectly to discern what a crying need there is to-day for the constructive theologian, the systematizer and expounder of positive religious truth. The spirit of disintegration has long been abroad. The tabernacles in which the vital truths of Christianity have been provided with a temporary lodging are dissolving. We have had critics enough—enough, we are sometimes tempted to say, and to spare—and the result is that you find the active-minded people in all the Churches avowing that they cannot accept this doctrine or the other—at least, in the form in which it has commonly been presented to them—and you see clearly that they do not quite know where they are. You are afraid that they will become nothing but critics and objectors, knowing what they do not believe, but not knowing what they do believe, possessed, it may be, of the religious instinct still, but grasping thin air, driven from their old homes, and left without a roof to cover them, if not without any solid foundation on which they may begin again to build :—

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest the head.

Now there is something both pathetic and perilous in this condition of things. What is it that we need, then? We need wise master-builders. We do not need men who will tell us that it is impossible for us to believe any longer in the Hell of the Mediæval Church. We know that. Those lurid flames have died out. The burning lake has vanished

like a ghastly dream. We dread it no more. What we do need is some clear, solemn statement of the doctrine of retribution, that shall be consonant with Scripture, and entirely credible—a statement the force and reasonableness of which the minds of men shall be compelled, however reluctantly, to admit, and the acceptance of which shall inspire with a wholesome fear all those who as yet have not been attracted by the beauty of holiness, or impelled by the power of love. Nor are we in need of those who will point out to us how much there was that was crude, or one-sided, or inconsistent with sound exegesis, or with the certainties of science, or with the facts of human experience, in the doctrines of the Atonement, or of Imputed Righteousness, or of Justification by Faith, or of the Providence and Government of God, or of the Operation of the Holy Spirit, as these doctrines were once taught and understood. We need rather those who have the goodness, the genius, and the knowledge which will enable them so to set forth these great facts, or ideas as that they shall command the willing assent both of the understanding and the conscience. The men who can render to their generation this noble service are the men for us to hope for, and pray for, and receive with all gladness when they appear.

And what is true in respect of doctrine is true equally of our polity and our mission. Here, too, the need makes itself felt of that which is definite and positive. Liberty has been one of our great cries in the past. We have struggled for liberty, and made many sacrifices for it, we or our fathers before us. But liberty, however glorious a thing,

and however greatly to be prized, may yet be viewed too exclusively on its negative side. It is a great possession, but after all its value depends very much on the use you are going to make of it. We are Free Churchmen. But how free? Free from, or free for? What a different meaning is given to the word by the two prepositions! We talk of our religious liberty and, indeed, it is a great thing to have liberty in the sense of being independent of external control, but, great as it is, it becomes a little thing to us if we do not see that the glory of being thus set free from external restrictions and interferences is in the opportunity which is so given to us of living some life of our own which is worth living, and doing some work of our own which is worth doing, and accomplishing some mission of our own which is worth accomplishing. It is, indeed, a misery greatly to be lamented if we have bought our freedom at so costly a price that, after all our bitter struggles and all our painful sacrifices, we should spend our days in idleness, and dwindle and decay and die in the good and the large land in which by the mercy of God our feet have been set at last. I do not know that there is much danger of that, but that all possible danger may be averted there is need that we should have set before us in the clearest and most positive terms what is the life that we ought to live, and the mission that we ought to fulfil. There is a book which is known well, at least by name, to every Oxford man. Its title is *The Ideal of a Christian Church*. I have sometimes wished that some good Congregationalist with an imaginative cast of mind, and endowed with literary gifts, would

borrow the title, and write a treatise on the "Ideal of a Christian Church" from his own standpoint. It would be such a mercy to many of us if we could have a little more of the trowel, if not a little less of the sword; and if, while we were not permitted to forget what may be defective or dangerous in other religious systems, we were made to see, and enabled to hold, with a firm hand, that which is right and good in our own; and, further, if we could tell how to illustrate and commend the positive excellences of our own system, not merely by the learning of our text-books, or the rhetoric of our pulpits and platforms, but by the life which our Churches are seen to live, and by the work which they are known to do.

II. A second need of which many of us must be conscious, in connection with our Free Church life, is that we should know how to make it interesting and attractive, how to give a charm to it, how to reveal and develop the hidden beauty which it does not lack, but which can only be fully discerned by sympathetic eyes. I call to mind what Newman said of his friend Keble, and of the work which Keble did for the Anglican Church. "He did for that Church," says Newman, "what only a poet could do. He made it poetical. He found it all but destitute of that divine element, and by the power of his happy magic he almost"—such is the somewhat grudging concession which the Cardinal is willing to make—"he almost elevated the Anglican formularies and ordinances into the dignity of a religious system." Well: are we not in need, in the Free Churches, of those who, whether

they may claim to be poets or not, will yet be able to do for us something of the same kind of work which Keble did for the Anglican Church? There is a common impression that whatever elements of solid worth there may be amongst us there is not much that can be called attractive to the outsider. To many our form of worship does not appear to be admirable. Mr. Matthew Arnold said, in his blunt, contemptuous way, that our religion was, perhaps, "the most dismal performance ever invented by man," and he prophesied that men in the future, while they would shape for themselves, as they could, their intellectual conceptions, would go to church for beauty and poetry of religious service. And there are a good many people who feel as he felt, though they may prefer not to express themselves in quite the same language. "In the Church," they say, "we have, at least, a noble and ancient liturgy, which will always have a charm of its own for the educated mind. We have the glamour of the past to dignify the whole function. We worship in buildings which, if they are not venerable for their age, are for the most part beautiful to behold. We have beauty in decorations, in windows, in vestments, in every form and shape that can gratify the sense, and we have sweet and solemn music which ravishes the ear and carries away the heart captive. All is beautiful, impressive, interesting, except, perhaps, sometimes the sermon. That is in church. But in chapel! Well, in chapel it is different. Everything is so modern in chapel, or if there is anything that is old, it is old enough to be ugly, but not old enough to be interesting. There

is much, too, which is not in good taste. The prayers do not affect us as we are affected by the prayers in church ; and as to the singing, though it is often hearty enough, it is by no means so beautiful as the exquisite performances of the trained choir in well-appointed churches of the Anglican communion." We have heard such criticisms over and over again, until, perhaps, we are beginning to get a little tired of them. Now, if we choose we can meet those who speak in this strain by reproofs and remonstrances. We may say to them : " You ought not to think so much of what is beautiful and interesting. Poetry is one thing and religion is another thing, and men ought to come to church for spiritual purposes, not for æsthetic enjoyment."

But I doubt whether that is the wisest kind of rejoinder that we can make. It is better to recognize frankly that the love of what is beautiful is perfectly natural, and is, indeed, entirely praiseworthy, and to consider whether satisfaction cannot be found for it in the religious homes with which we are identified. I have myself a very strong conviction that it can. Take the question of our services. Mr. Arnold complains of their being dismal, and sometimes, it must be owned, they are. But I am sure there is no reason in the world why they should be dismal, or why they should not be, after their own order, most beautiful and most attractive in the eyes, at least, of those who do not judge wholly by purely conventional standards, and are able to discern any charm in things that are not according to the current fashion. There may, indeed, be reasons why they cannot be made beautiful

in the sense in which a highly elaborate ritual may be made beautiful. But there is a beauty in simplicity as well as in elaboration, in that which is natural and spontaneous as well as in that which is artificial and the result of laborious construction. The fir-tree in the vigour of its life amid the Alpine snows is not less beautiful than the same tree, gay with tinsel and toys, when it is decked out with a hundred candles for the Christmas feast. The song of the solitary reaper, whose plaintive numbers fill all the Highland vale, has power to touch the poet's heart not less than the finished performance of the prima donna, resplendent with millinery and jewels. And we, with the picture before our eyes of the dusty-sandalled Nazarene, clad in His seamless robe, and talking familiarly with the country folk in the homeliest language, may well claim that in the region of the spiritual there is a peculiar grace and glory in the beauty which is unadorned. Do not suppose that amid the very humblest people, in the plainest of buildings, or, if you will, in no building at all, but at the corner of the dreariest street and beneath the wintry sky, there cannot be such reverence of spirit, such quietness of demeanour, such elevation of thought, such pathetic longing after the Beatific Vision, as to make the service a thing of unspeakable grace and loveliness to those who do not look only on the outward appearance. Let it be our part to try to see things as they are, and to help others to see them in the same light ; and while we make it our endeavour to save our services from everything that could justly offend the cultivated mind, let it

also be our endeavour to be the interpreters of the charm, the nobleness, the dignity of perfect simplicity and naturalness, like that of the little child, in things that pertain to the Kingdom of God.

Nor is it simplicity only that has its charm for the open eye and the purified taste. Is there no beauty also in honesty of speech ; is there no attraction for the poetic sense in the harmony which it can discern between the convictions of the mind and the utterance of the lips ; and ought it not to be possible for us to show that a religious service, though bare of outward adornment, may yet be beautiful just because of its transparent reality ? " We shall go to church," Mr. Arnold told us, " for the poetry and the beauty of religious worship, while we shape our intellectual conceptions, as best we can, for ourselves." That seems to mean that we shall use the language and the symbolism of the church, because it is all so beautiful, though we shall not be able to believe in the doctrines which the language and the symbols are intended to express and to symbolize. But can there be the truest poetry, and the divinest beauty, where speech and sentiment are not in harmony with truth ? when we assent with our lips to one thing, but believe another thing in our hearts. A thing must be genuine to be beautiful. The roof of the cathedral at Milan loses all its loveliness the moment you discover it is a painted make-believe. You turn with something like repulsion from the rose which is nothing but a cunning manufacture out of paper. The honest little daisy on the lawn that makes no pretence

has infinitely greater attractions for you. There is no "beauty of religious worship" where there is no holiness, and there can be no holiness without sincerity. That is what we have to help men to see, that nothing is so interesting as that which is essentially true, and that the man who says it is very charming and very interesting to listen to an anthem, which may be magnificently sung but to the spiritual meaning of which no one gives any sort of attention, while he can listen to the poor publican who lifts not up so much as his eyes to heaven but smites on his breast and prays God to have mercy on him a sinner, without finding anything in that pitiful cry of a contrite heart to awaken his interest or attract his sympathy, is a man who has yet to learn what are the primary conditions of true beauty and true poetry. Now, I should earn your just reproach if I were to say that instructed persons cannot follow, throughout, the services of other Churches than ours with the unfaltering consent of the intellect. God forbid that I should charge any brother Christian, lightly, with insincerities. At the same time I must be permitted to say that to me there is something not only admirable, but, in the deepest sense, beautiful also, in that spirit which is impatient of all private interpretations and mental reservations, and which is determined, no matter at what sacrifice, at what cost, to bring the speech and symbolism of public worship into the most perfect accord which is possible with men's honest convictions and secret faith, caring less, in all great matters, for that which may make a pleasing impression on the senses, or may

touch the historical imagination, than for that which is severely, simply, absolutely true.

Once more, in connection with this subject of the poetry of our Church life, ought we not to be able to make it understood and felt, that it is not only institutions and rites and liturgies, all of which are inanimate things, that are interesting, but that human nature, with its infinite varieties, with all its littleness, with all its greatness, with its wild aberrations, its noble capabilities, its passionate instincts, its eternal discontent, its craving for rest, is interesting too, and beyond measure more interesting. I cannot help thinking that those whose sympathy and devotion are chiefly expended on mere institutions are a little off the track. "I will make you fishers of men," said Christ to his first followers. It was to men he looked, men in their sorrows, and their sins, and their deep, inarticulate needs, whom He loved and for whom He cared, and for whom He laid down His life. Nor were the commonest sort of men common to Him; nor was He interested only in interesting people. The publicans and sinners drew near to hear Him, and they were attracted to Him, because He was first attracted to them. To Him the famous line in Terence might be applied with profound significance. He was indeed a "Man, and He counted nothing human foreign to Himself." And if we have learned of Christ, then we shall have learned to look upon our fellow-men, even upon those in whom there is nothing very winning in the way of goodness, and nothing very fascinating in the way of wickedness, upon commonplace, unromantic, dull people—

Philistines, if you care to call them so ; people such as are still to be found in most of our congregations, even in this day of widespread culture and universal education—upon such, upon all, who gaze upon us out of sweet human eyes, and have human hearts beating within them, we shall have learned to look with love, with sympathy, with respect. And it will appear to us that a fellowship of living souls, a company of men bound together by sacred ties, honouring and serving each other, bearing each other's burdens, and labouring together in the same holy cause, is something more beautiful by far, and more worthy of admiration, than any institution which is little more than an institution. Do we not acknowledge that ? In our hearts we do. The Temple at Jerusalem was very splendid with its marble and gold, and wonderfully interesting in its way, but if we could be put back by some strange magic through all the centuries of the Christian era, so that we should find ourselves in Jerusalem on the most solemn night in the history of our race, it would not be to the Temple that our steps would be turned, but to the plain and homely guest-chamber in which we should discover a little group of quite humble people engaged in earnest talk, with their Master in the midst. Or if, a few years later, we were in the neighbourhood of the great city of Ephesus, we should not be attracted so much to the wonder of the world which we should know to be there as to the spot by the seashore where a few ministers of an unfashionable sect were met to pray with their old teacher, and to bid him a long farewell. Living men have so much greater

charm for us than the most venerable institutions. What is the application of this? It lies here. Our system, in a pre-eminent way, throws us upon each other. Our temples are the men and women who are filled with the Holy Ghost. We deal not so much with abstractions and ideas as with saints and sinners. And, therefore, it becomes us, in a very special manner, to discover how much there is in human nature, even in some of its less attractive varieties, that is noble and pathetic; to learn what graces are to be found beneath the roughest exterior, and how much poetry there is, however mixed up with not a little that is vulgar and repellent, in the lives and actions, in the woes and wants, the sorrows and aspirations of even the least exalted of mankind.

III. One other thing we need. We need a race of prophets. He gave—first, apostles; secondarily, prophets. These, as I understand it, were men who believed, not simply because they were told, or because they were convinced, but because they saw. The truth flashed upon the inward eye, and they knew it was the truth. They saw for themselves and they felt intensely the glory of what they saw. And as they saw and felt, so they had the gift to declare to others what they had seen, and what they had felt. These were the prophets—men who saw, who felt, who could speak. Such are the men we want. And if God gives them to us, we shall not hear a great deal, I suspect, in the future about the priest. There is alarm in many minds to-day on the subject of the priest. His influence is growing, so it is said. And it may be

so. But how do you explain the priest? You cannot explain him simply by talking of human pride, and arrogance, and love of power. These are elements that must not be left out of account, but they do not explain everything. You must explain the priest, in part, from another side. It is the demand which has created the supply. Men are in darkness. They are perplexed. They feel that they are far away from God. Their souls are unquiet, and they cannot rest until they find rest in Him. And the priest comes to them in their unrest, and their hunger, and their nameless fear. And he speaks with decision, with authority. "Do this, and this," he says, "and all shall be well. The wrath of the Invisible shall be appeased. You shall be reconciled to Him. Here He is, in the bread, in the wine. Take, eat, drink, and you shall be satisfied." What wonder if the poor, helpless, baffled soul listens and consents. It is not the best conceivable that is offered to him, but it seems to be the best that he can get. How can you blame him for taking it? But if there comes to him one who can speak of what he has himself seen and felt of the glory of God, do you think he will continue to cling to the skirts of the priest then? He will know better. There was a time in Israel when the priest seemed to have it all his own way. Tradition reigned supreme. Religion had become a matter of ritual. But there arose one in the wilderness whom all men counted to be a prophet, and they went out, Jerusalem and all Judæa and all the region round about Jordan to hear what he had to say and to receive his baptism. The people

will always want to know what the prophet has to say. And there is no reason why all the Lord's people should not be prophets. Some, indeed, will be quicker to see than others, but there should be none in the Church of Christ wholly unable to see for himself and compelled to receive all the truth he knows at second hand. That is not according to the meaning and the will of Christ. It is not the apostles only who are to be able to say, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you." The seeing and the hearing, the vision and the voice are for every member of the Christian society. But, most of all, those who aspire to be the teachers and guides of their fellows should pray that they may possess and use this inestimable gift. Learning is ever to be held in high honour, and no wise man will speak lightly of the eloquent tongue, or the acute intellect, or the heart which is the home of tender human charities. But we need something more than learning, or eloquence, or the power of sympathy if we would be the helpers of men in the highest ways. We need a heavenly vision ; we need to know the secret of the Lord. And, however diligent we may be in study, however abundant in labours, however faithful in the exercise and discipline of our intellectual gifts, it can scarcely be said of us that we are qualifying for the holiest service, unless we are seeking to fulfil the conditions upon which the spirit of discernment and of prophecy is bestowed upon the sons of men.

Perhaps we are in some danger, placed as we are amid the din and dust of ceaseless controversy, of losing that quietness and patience of soul without

which the whispers of the Eternal Spirit cannot be heard, and the deep things of God cannot be seen. There is so much to be done, and so much to be thought about, that we know not how to find time for the solitary place and the hour of prayer. But if we are never out of the crowd and away from the noontide glare, how shall we see the star in the silent heavens, or hear the unearthly music of the angels' song ; and how will it be possible for us to declare to those who listen to us that we have followed not cunningly devised fables, when we have made known unto them the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, but have been with Him in the Holy Mount, and have been eye-witnesses of His majesty? "Blessed," said Jesus to His disciples, "are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear." May these gracious words of benediction, falling from the sacred lips of Him in whose face is shining the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, be heard to-day in the secret chambers of the heart by every member of this congregation, and may such grace and boldness be given to us as will enable us to declare to others what we have seen and heard, that they may have fellowship with us. Never were we more wanted. Is not the Church's need, and therefore the need of all this weary, dark and sinful world, even more urgent to-day than when this beautiful building was first opened for the worship of God but a few short weeks ago ? If we were lagging then, we should not be lagging now, to whom there has been given, in the bounty of heaven, any power to heal, or grace to guide, or spirit to serve. For with what sad

insistence has the sound of the passing bell been calling us, amid the gloom of these November days, to take the places and to carry on the work of leaders and companions who have fallen by our side. Now in this part of the field and now in that the standard-bearer has been laid low. In your own Oxford, in London, in Manchester, in Paris, there has been the same solemn and affecting story to tell. Chair and pulpit are empty. The brave heart has ceased to beat. The strong right arm has dropped the weapon it wielded so well. The voice of the teacher is silent. The faithful shepherd has been smitten. After much toil our brethren sleep. It is for us to honour their memories by taking up in faith and courage, like their own, the burden they bore so nobly. Let us pray to-day for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here on earth, that men of every tribe and every name, men of valour and men of understanding, men with one talent and men with five may gather themselves together into one vast host, as the bands of Israel gathered themselves together at Hebron, that our common Lord and Master, Son of David, Son of Man, Son of the Eternal Love may be crowned King over all the race which He has redeemed with His own precious blood.

VII.—SAVED BY HIS LIFE ¹

If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.—ROMANS v. 10.

“**R**EPENT” is the first word of the Gospel, and repentance the first thing that is necessary if we would walk in the Way of Life.

But now suppose that this first word has been listened to, and this first necessary step has been taken. We have come at last to ourselves, and the result of the self-discovery has been to fill us with sorrow and shame, and to lead us to true repentance. Our life in the past has been, we see, but a poor business. It has been a mistake throughout. But now we have come to the beginning of better things. We are going to turn over a new leaf, and to become new creatures. That is our hope and our determination. And we set to work without delay to carry our good purposes into practice.

And what happens next? Men talk of repenting sometimes as if it were a very simple matter indeed. You are sorry for your sins and give them up. You seek forgiveness and obtain it. And all is well. The whole thing is plain enough. That is the impression that seems to be on some minds.

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And this is what, perhaps, we actually feel when we are just making the fresh start. We think nothing of difficulties. Sin has become odious to us. We have lost all taste for it. We cannot think how it could ever have had any attraction for us. It is done with, thank God. We have cast it off for ever. The burden has rolled away, and there is a delightful sense of relief. We are cured of a malignant disease, the very recollection of which makes us shudder. And the holy life which is opening before us appears to be full of charm and beauty. How blessed it will be to walk in that narrow way, with such friends and companions as will be ours ! What a happiness it will be to live honestly and cleanly, in the spirit of prayer, supported by the Christian hope as true children of the morning ! We are eager to be moving. The end of the journey seems to be not very far away. Already our feet are among the flowers of Immanuel's land. Already we think we can discern, though it may be through a mist of happy tears, the glory of the pearly gate.

But if these are our anticipations at the outset, how soon are they disappointed ! The strong emotion that has possessed us may carry us forward a little distance, but soon it becomes apparent that the way of life is beset with difficulties. Learning to be good seems to be like acquiring an art. You see a man painting a landscape or performing on some musical instrument, and you think that it looks perfectly easy. Surely any man could do what that man is doing with so little sense of effort. You could do it yourself. And you try. But what a humbling experience it is. What a bungler you

prove yourself to be. This is wrong, and that is wrong. And you acknowledge that your first attempt has come to very little. And so it is with holy living. When you begin to put your good resolutions into practice, alas! what faltering there is, what misadventure, what chagrin! You cannot do the things you would. Something within you seems to hinder your progress in some unaccountable fashion, and what was to have been so fair and perfect turns out to be a grotesque failure, a miserable breakdown, and before very long you find yourself floundering in some Slough of Despond, and you are ready to say that it could never have been meant that you should be good, and that you may as well give the whole thing up without further struggle.

Now, if anything like that should be your experience, I do not know that we can do better than make a study of that great passage in the Epistle to the Romans, in the fifth chapter, in which St. Paul has so much to say about the Christian life, and the means by which its difficulties may be overcome and its blessedness realized. Anybody who will read this passage at all carefully will be at no loss to understand what it is on which the Apostle is setting his heart, and how he gets the assurance that the desire of his heart will be fulfilled.

He begins by speaking of Justification. "Being justified by faith," he says, "let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." By being justified, he means being brought into peaceable and happy relations with God. He does not mean being made holy in respect of personal character, certainly not being made perfectly holy. I know

that the attempt has been made to show that there is no real difference between Justification and Sanctification. But I cannot think that they meant quite the same thing to St. Paul, though no doubt he felt them to be intimately related. A man is justified, in his sense, when, though he may have many faults and infirmities and be very far indeed from being perfectly good and holy, he is yet accepted by God as His child and His friend. And he is thus accepted whenever he is willing to join himself in faith and love to Jesus Christ, his doing that being the pledge that the desire of his heart is to be made like Christ in all things, however he may fail here and there, and whatever corruption and impurity may be still clinging to him.

But is it enough for a man to be on such terms with God, to be accepted, and to know that he is accepted, and to be wishing that he was a perfectly good man? It was certainly not enough for St. Paul; on the contrary, what comes out with singular emphasis in this chapter is his longing to be not safe merely in the sense of being accepted, but holy, through and through, righteous in all his ways and all his works. See how he proceeds: "And let us rejoice in hope of the glory of God." And what do you think he means by that hope? What is this "glory of God"? Not so much, I think, any great vision which he is to see, or outward splendour with which he is to be invested. Is it not rather the glory of being God-like of which he is chiefly thinking, the glory of being made perfect in character? All St. Paul's personal ambitions lay in this direction; and he was prepared to endure

any troubles, to fight any battles, to make any sacrifices if only that ambition could be gratified. Nothing mattered if he were permitted to reach that glorious goal, to gain that heavenly prize. So much does he covet this perfected salvation that he can rejoice even in those tribulations which he sees may be instrumental in bringing about the great consummation. Anything that will "turn to his salvation"—to use a phrase which he employs in writing to the Philippians, where he is speaking in the same strain—anything that will tend to make him more Christ-like, though it may be in itself a bitter and humiliating experience, he is able to rejoice in. All the most painful discipline of life may be cheerfully endured, may be welcomed with a solemn gladness, if the end of it is the realization of that "hope of the glory of God."

And now, what is the ground for such a hope? The answer is not far to seek. It is just the love of God. If you are sure of any man's love you will know that he will do for you the very best that he can. And so Paul felt that if God truly loved him He would see to it that he was made at last perfect in holiness. And how does he get the assurance of this Divine Love? In two ways: First, he speaks of it as a gift, or as an effect of the Holy Ghost. "The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost which was given unto us." We are made to know and to feel by the operation of a Divine influence that is at work within us that that love is a great fact. It is an inward conviction that we get, not by reasoning, but rather as an inspiration. The wonderful thought comes home to us as a

reality, and we are sure that it is God by His Spirit who is thus making us aware of this most blessed of all truths. But it is not only through the quickening and enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit that Paul becomes assured of the love of God. It is in part, also, a matter of inference, of proof; for there is a great historic fact which, to the Apostle, is a sure evidence of its reality. That fact is the death of Jesus Christ. "God commendeth His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Paul had no doubt that this was the deepest meaning of the Cross. It was the supreme proof of God's love for sinful men.

And now we are in a position to understand and to appreciate the force of the argument which follows. If God has loved us, and has given us that great proof of His love; if when we were so sinful and so weak, when we could do nothing for ourselves, and had made, as yet, no movement in the direction of righteousness; if, then, God so loved us, may we not confidently reckon on His giving us all the help we need, and doing for us all that needs to be done in order that we may be made perfect in holiness and peace and joy? He who cared enough for us to begin the good work will surely be concerned to complete it. If Christ loved us enough to die for us, will not His love avail to save us, even to the uttermost, with that salvation which means entire deliverance from every evil way? "Being reconciled through His death, shall we not be saved by His life?" If so great kindness was shown to us when we were enemies, shall we be forsaken, and left to struggle on alone,

now that we have become friends ? It is impossible to believe it. That is the argument.

And what is the practical bearing of it all ? Why just this, that the living of that holy life, which we find so difficult, and which is, indeed, beyond our reach, in any strength of our own, that the working out of our salvation, which seems to be a task wholly beyond our powers, is, in truth, God's business, which it is His good pleasure to accomplish, that this is His work, just as much as that act of grace, by which we were first quickened and led to a knowledge of the truth, was His work that we are saved in the fullest sense, by Christ's life, by the "supply of His Spirit," as it is put in the Epistle to the Philippians, by Christ's communication of Himself, and not by our own unaided efforts, though there may be, and must be, effort on our part, and though it must often be laborious.

Does this seem to you to be nothing better than a theological subtlety ? Oh ! but it is not a theological subtlety at all. It is rather a fact of most practical, most vital importance. For, depend upon it, there is a vast difference between the position of the man who is painfully, and sometimes almost hopelessly, toiling forwards in the hope of holiness, who is vainly, however nobly, struggling to make himself good, and the position of that man who is a partaker of the life and power which Christ communicates. It is the difference between failure, thralldom, despondency on the one hand, and victory, freedom, joy on the other. The man who has been long without food may press on for a time with his work, but he must break down sooner or later, and

all that he does will be done wearily and with difficulty. But let him have such food as suits him, and a sufficient supply, and what a change there will be ! He will be another man, and his work will have quite another aspect to him, and will be done, if not without exertion or carefulness, which is not to be desired, at least without any feeling of hopeless inadequacy. So let any man be feeding daily on that Living Bread which comes down from heaven, and he will be "much cheered," and will find himself "faring bravely," and labour will be light, and great things will seem possible to him, which otherwise would be far out of his reach. He will have spirit for anything.

And I think we have much to learn, that we are but beginners in the Divine life, if we have never learned anything of this salvation, which comes through the supply of Christ's spirit. We may pass for religious people. We may be unhesitating believers in all the articles of the Christian Creed. We may be devout worshippers, diligent workers, useful citizens, upright, conscientious, earnest men, and yet how little we know of the Christian Redemption, in the fulness and the power and the glory of it ! What a dull, dead thing the most scrupulous orthodoxy may be, and how dead may be all our dead works, and how destitute of all the glow and warmth of life our worship may be, yes, and must be, if we are not sharers in that glorious power and that clear vision of things invisible by which the world may be overcome ! That is our great need. Not so much more money or better methods or more correct opinions, but more of that life which Christ

came to give us abundantly, more of that Divine Spirit who in us will bring forth all His fruits of love and joy and peace, more of that might in the power of which we shall be able to do all things.

And how comes this Divine life? How may we get this supernatural power? There is only one possible answer to that question. It comes through faith. But, again, what is faith? There is a faith which is nothing more than an indolent assent of the mind, and there is a faith which is a vague confidence in God that, somehow, He will take care of us and bring us at last to perfection. But it is not such faith which saves the soul. The saving faith is something more vital, more energetic. It is something which brings us face to face with Christ, which involves a clear apprehension, on our part, of His character, His personality, and the yielding of ourselves to His influence, and the deliberate and solemn acceptance of His help, and the consecration of our wills to His service.

That is faith, and it must be present in some degree if we are to receive from Christ that which He is prepared to give. There are certain men of whom it is said that they have a magnetic, almost a mesmeric, power over their fellows. They cast a strange spell over those who are brought under their influence. Sometimes their control over other minds is so extraordinary that there seems to be practically no limit to it. They can do what they please with their patients, if that is the right word. They govern them for the time being absolutely. These are facts which are well known to medical science, and, indeed, they are facts which have

sometimes attracted a good deal of public attention. They have seemed to be so remarkable, so significant. And even when the power exerted by one mind over another is not carried to an extent so abnormal, so perilous, as we may think, yet in our ordinary relations with each other we know how men of character and strong will can infect their followers with their own spirit, can put into them life, and energy, and hope.

But in order to get strength and inspiration in this way from our fellow-men it is necessary for us to believe in them, to put ourselves into their hands, to let them come in and possess us, as it were, for a while. If we are distrustful and rebellious we shall get no help from them. We shall be like people who keep their doors and windows closed so that the light and air cannot come in.

Now I cannot but think that there is a suggestive analogy here, between this kind of personal influence which one man may exert over another and the vitalizing and inspiring grace that comes from Jesus Christ. Stand aloof from Christ and He cannot help you. Harden your heart ; wrap yourself up in your self-sufficiency and pride ; insist, in your self-will, on maintaining your own independence, and He will be little or nothing to you. How is it possible for Him to be of much service in that case ? Your guide cannot help you up the steep mountain-path if you are afraid to take his hand. The doctor has not a fair chance if you will not put yourself under his care. But put away your pride ; let yourself go ; trust yourself to Christ, as the birds trust themselves to the air, as the ship when it is

launched commits itself to the buoyant waters. Fling open wide the gate, and let that King of Glory come in, that Lord of all power and might, that Sun and dear Saviour of the soul, let Him come in, and see whether the effect of that self-abandonment will not be that you shall be filled with His fulness and saved by His life. If thus we are willing to die we shall surely find that we are beginning to live with that life which is life indeed. "What multitudes," says Dr. Sears, "have found not only rest but everlasting joy at the feet of Jesus Christ, simply by giving themselves away to Him in an unbounded trust, who never tried to excogitate the methods of the atonement or those eternal laws of being which it fulfils. In spiritual things, as in natural, the law of supply and demand is sure in its operations and last results. What we want in Christ we always find in Him. When we want nothing we find nothing. When we want little we find little. When we want much we find much. But when we want everything, and get reduced to complete nakedness and beggary, we find in Him God's complete treasure-house, out of which come gold and jewels, and garments to clothe us, wavy in the richness and glory of the Lord."

VIII.—THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH ¹

THE question is whether the Public Worship of our Churches is all that it might be, and, if it is not, whether anything can be done to make it more beautiful, more interesting, more efficient. I imagine that few of us are satisfied with things as they are. But what is wrong? What is spoiling or hindering our worship? We read that one evening, in the last week of His life, our Lord went into the Temple, and looked round about on all things and came away again, apparently without saying a word. But we know what He saw and how deeply troubled He was by what He saw, and we know what He did the following day. He saw that the worship of God was being made impossible. What with the tramping up and down of people who were using the Temple pavement as a short cut, the clatter of coins on the money-changers' tables, the protestations of those who were driving bargains, and the cries of the sacrificial animals—what with all this distracting noise and confusion it was impossible for any poor soul to pray. If anyone wanted to pray it would be best for him to leave the Temple and betake himself to some quiet garden or unfrequented street. The

¹ A paper read at the meeting of the Congregational Union.

House of Prayer had been turned into a place of merchandise, even into a den of thieves.

And one asks what Christ would see, and what He would think, if He were to come into one of our churches and listen, and look round about Him on all things. How is it with us? What is there that is helping our worship? What is there that is hindering?

The character of the building is not perhaps of very great importance, though it does count for something. There are buildings in which, partly it may be because of the memories and associations connected with them, it seems natural to pray. And there are buildings which somehow we do not feel so congenial to the spirit of devotion. We cannot afford to disregard altogether the effect on the spirit of external conditions. However, I do not lay stress upon this. It is we ourselves that matter most, not the kind of building we worship in. And we may be great helpers or great hindrances. Everyone can do something towards creating the right kind of atmosphere. It is always easier to worship if the congregation is really lifting up its soul to God. We help each other strangely in this subtle way. And on the other hand, if we are conscious of people present who are not attempting, or desiring to worship at all, that damps our ardour, and dulls our vision. It is as though a cloud were shutting out the sun. We are chilled and discouraged.

But those who have a prominent part to take in the service have a heavier responsibility, and their responsibility is grave indeed. What a wonderful

help music may be ! “ How did I weep,” writes St. Augustine, “ in the hymns and canticles, touched to the quick by the voices of that sweetly attuned church : the voices flowed into mine ears, and the truth distilled into my heart, whence the affections of my devotions overflowed, and tears ran down, and happy was I therein.” But music, even though the execution may be brilliant enough, does not always help. The anthem may fill us with peace, or carry us up to the Gate of Heaven. But it may drown the still small voice, and scare all good angels away. We owe much to our organists and choirs. But the most skilful organist may be our enemy, and the best-trained choir may so play their part as to confuse or destroy all inward and spiritual harmonies.

But it is the minister whose responsibility is the greatest, especially in our Free Churches. Do you not wonder sometimes how any man can dare to lead the devotions of the Church ? So much depends on what he may say, and on his manner of saying it, and so much depends on the kind of man that he is. How can we follow the prayer of a man of whose sincerity we are in doubt, whom we feel to be a trifler, a performer, pluming himself on the beauty of his metaphors, or the exquisite turn of his sentences ? Especially is it difficult for us to follow one who gives us the impression that he is putting on a sanctimonious air. Nothing is so fatal as that. Slips of grammar, defects of pronunciation, incoherence even, may be forgiven to a man who realizes that he is in the presence of God, but affectation spoils everything. The first necessity for the leader of public prayer is that he should

be simple, that he should be natural, that he should be himself, and alas ! how hard it often is to be simple, to be natural, to be just oneself, an instrument that God may use as He will.

I think that what we all need is that we should take public worship more seriously, that we should consider what it means to us Christian people, what it is that we are doing when we come together to pray and to glorify God. The external aspect of it all we consider perhaps carefully enough. We give a good deal of attention to the building and its furnishing. We deal with questions of lighting, heating, ventilation, the provision of ways and means, the ordering of the service, the arrangements for the pulpit, the duties of stewards. These things have to be thought of, and they are thought of, and we have reason to be most grateful to those who do think of them, and minister in so many ways to our comfort. But there are other things to be thought of which possibly do not always receive so much serious attention. What is it, after all, that we are professing to do when we are gathered together ? Whom are we hoping to meet ? What unseen and eternal things, or Persons, are to be concerned in the act to which we address ourselves often so lightly ? The building is perhaps a humble and unlovely structure, the singing is not going to be anything very grand from a musician's point of view, there is to be no famous orator in the pulpit, there will only be a few quite ordinary people in the pews. It will be a dull affair, we think, the service this morning. Dull ! but are we considering what it would mean to us if we had eyes to see, if

we had an awakened spirit, a quickened imagination ? There was a letter written long ago, in the primitive times, to a little Church in some big town, it would seem, in which there were other Churches. We do not know whether it was a man or a woman. There are some scholars who assert somewhat confidently that it was a woman. But it does not matter. This letter was evidently written by one who had formerly held a responsible position in this little Church, and he wrote to encourage his old friends, and in a gentle way to admonish them. They were losing heart a little. They were feeling—this little company of Hebrew Christians : you will understand to whom I refer—they were feeling that worship was not so impressive and so interesting as in the old days when there had been the incense and the priests, and all the ceremonial apparatus of the Temple. They, too, were feeling that their religious services were comparatively dull. And some of them were tempted to forsake the assembly—for that seems to be what is meant—to go off to some other church where things were a little brighter, and the people were of a more congenial type. That is the situation. And their old friend and teacher will try to help them to realize what it means, that service which they have been feeling to be dull. He will purge the eye of faith that it may see the glory of the mysteries hidden from the sense. He will touch the imagination with holy fire. He will make them aware of all that is present there in that poor place where they are accustomed to assemble together.

“Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.”

That was not merely a "dear and future vision" that eager hearts might expect. It was to be a present spiritual experience. Jerusalem had been for their fathers the joy of the whole earth, and when they were journeying through desert places towards the sacred city, the very thought of standing within her gates was enough to turn the sandy wilderness into a garden musical with bubbling streams and fragrant with the scent of roses. But these Hebrew Christians have come already to a far more glorious Jerusalem, the true city of the living God, whose pearly gates and shining towers the inward eye might discern. There it is that you stand, says the writer. You are come into the heavenly places. You are in the Jerusalem above which is free, which is the mother of us all.

"And to an innumerable company of Angels." What a thing that was to be told! Angels! What are Angels? We know nothing about them! We do indeed know little. But is it not something to think that when we draw near to God we may be coming into the presence of mysterious Beings whose place is in that world in which He reigns? "The Angel of Death has been abroad in the land," said John Bright in what, I suppose, was the most impressive speech that he ever made in the House of Commons; "you may almost hear the beating of his wings." The Angel of Death! but what if it were possible for us to hear, if only we had the quickened spiritual sense, the beating of the wings not of the Angel of Death, but of the Angels and Archangels, and all the Hosts of Heaven that are where God is, and where we mortals are, if we are

standing in the presence of God ! This is poetry, you say, and not plain prose. Of course it is poetry. All religion is. It is the presentation to the soul of ideas, and possibilities which cannot be clothed in the literalism of common speech or grasped by the aid of the logical understanding along. There is more than the mind can fathom in this picture of the innumerable company of Angels, but it is not a foolish fancy.

“ And to the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn which are written in Heaven.” That is the Church to which you belong. You think of your few dejected fellow-worshippers in that unpretending room which you have taken for your meeting-place, you look into their weary faces, you listen to the uninspiring things they say, you note that your numbers are dwindling and the contributions falling off. What a poor business it all is ! What can this handful of despised religionists, sectarians too, to make matters worse, what can they say for themselves ? That is the mocking question that is put to you by those who do not understand. But you can say this for yourselves in reply. You can say that you are one with the glorious company of the redeemed in Heaven and in Earth. You belong to them, and they belong to you, and when you come together to worship God you are sharing in their songs, and in the deep emotion with which they look, as you look, to the Eternal Father who has called you to become members of His Family and Household.

And there is more yet to be said of the meaning of every act of true worship. “ You are come to

God, the Judge of all." For that Eternal Father is Judge as well as Father. Judge in no harsh sense, but still Judge. And what a subduing thing, and what an uplifting thing to remember. We must all appear before the judgment-seat! Thank God for that—if God is to be the Judge. For what a blessed thing it is to fall into the hands of God, to rest and lie quiet there in the hands of One who knows us altogether, and can destroy that which is evil and own that which is good, who knows what we are and what we wish to be, and who cares, who is concerned in us, and willing to help us. We are misunderstood by men, wrongly praised, wrongly blamed. We are a puzzle to ourselves. And what an infinite comfort there is in Worship if it means coming into the presence of that most just and most merciful Judge!

"And to the Spirits of just men made perfect." What do you think of that? Consider how these commonplace little churches of ours are haunted! and not by memories only, however dear and fragrant, but by the dead who are alive unto God, and belong still to the Communion of Saints! How it would move us, what a thrill would pass through the Congregation if some day at our worship it were brought home to us with irresistible force that we were being joined by old friends from the other world! But where are those old friends likely to be but at our side when we gather together in the Name of Christ and bow in prayer? It will not be a dull service if we are made aware of that mystic fellowship with those vanished comrades.

"And to Jesus, the Mediator of the New

Covenant.” That is, as it were, the crown and consummation of all. Here is our centre, and the Source and Instrument of the sacred peace of the New Jerusalem, Mediator between God and man, between man and man, between the living and the dead ! There is He in the midst when we gather together for our worship ! We have used those memorable words of promise as a foundation on which we may build the fabric of our ecclesiastical polity ; we have used them, it may be, as a weapon with which we may assail those who differ from us. But we are greatly the losers if we are content to employ them simply for the purposes of controversy. It is best to treat them as if they were indeed true, and to let the glory and wonder of them make their due appeal to our minds. “ Ye are come—unto Jesus.” There He is ! lighting up the whole scene with the majesty of His Presence, enriching His brethren with the benediction of His Grace. And we believe that He is there. Of course we believe that He is there. But oh ! if we did believe it, if we could believe it, how our hearts would burn within us, and our eyes grow dim with happy tears, in spite of the meagre company of worshippers, and the building so devoid of all external charm, and the low exchequer that we have to deplore !

“ And the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” In that last word there is something that is profoundly moving. This blood of sprinkling ! We do not often say anything in these days of the blood. The word repels us. It has been used so glibly, with such confident dogmatism, as if it were possible to fathom

to its depths the sacred mystery. But how significant and how affecting is the restraint of the writer's language here! "that speaketh better things than that of Abel"; there is no attempt to measure or describe those better things. Who can measure them? Who can describe them? The interpretation of them is wisely left to the deepest instinct of our spiritual nature.

I say again that what we need most is to take our worship more seriously, to enter upon it in a spirit of sober and steady recollection. External things are of importance, perhaps of more importance than we have realized. Our ministers, our organists, our architects, our church furnishers can help us. But external things are not the things that matter most. Our fathers felt it to be worth while to come together for the worship of God even at the risk of imprisonment or death. But it was not because of the beauty of the buildings they worshipped in, or the charm of the music they listened to, that they felt it to be worth while. It mattered little to them what the building was like. What did matter was the sense that came over them as they met together of Eternal Realities. They breathed the air of the Heavenly Jerusalem. They joined in the new song sung before the Sapphire Throne. They felt upon them the anointing hands of the great High Priest of their profession. It was an experience that was worth any risk. And what most concerns us to-day is to recover something of their faith if we can, and to share their clear and solemn vision.

IX.—THE ADORNING OF THE BRIDE

WHEN Zion awakes and puts on her strength, she must put on also her beautiful garments. And that is surely what our Churches are being called to do to-day by every true prophetic voice. Beautiful garments we have, or we might have. But they are too little used. They are kept out of sight, as though they were too precious and costly for everyday wear. And we go about in sordid rags, or decked out in cheap and gaudy splendours that ill become us, instead of robing ourselves in the white raiment, and putting on the ornaments of refined gold, which all faithful souls may have for the asking.

Is it not matter for common complaint that we are lacking in beauty and attractiveness? Even the children of our Congregational Churches do not always rise up and call them blessed. We may hope to keep them by talking of loyalty, of principle, of conviction, of truth. But the very need of such appeals bears witness to a certain want of natural charm, for if we were all that we might be there could scarcely be so much necessity for this frequent exposition of principle. And as to those that are outside, it is to be feared that, though many of them give us credit for the possession of solid

and respectable virtues, there are few that praise us for our beauty. "We esteem you," they say; "we acknowledge your services to many a good cause, and we admit your worth; but we are not in love with you. Your buildings do not please us. Your worship is, no doubt, sincere; but we do not fancy the form and fashion of it. At your Church meetings and prayer meetings, as we understand, there is much to jar on the feelings and offend the cultivated taste. You are an excellent people, but we are not allured. You command our respect, but you fail to fascinate." This is what many think and not a few are heard to say.

And what reply shall we make? We may say, if we choose, that we do not claim to be beautiful; that we do not care about beauty; that beauty is of no importance; that the thing is to be on the side of truth, and to be faithful to conscience; and we may recommend those that seek things that are lovely to look elsewhere, and give a welcome only to such as prize things that are useful and things that are strong. This we may do if we choose. But it is to be hoped that we shall not choose. We are blind and foolish if we do; for we ought to care about beauty, and we ought to suspect something gravely amiss if in us there is no beauty that the true-hearted should desire us. Beauty is of God as much as truth, and belongs essentially to all goodness of the divinest quality. What right have we to despise the holy and fair apparel which is the glory of the Heavenly Bride?

Only there is this to be considered—that there are various types and orders of beauty, and that it is

the noblest and the most spiritual loveliness for which we need to have the chief concern. Let us not fall into any vulgar error. It is *within* that the King's daughter is all-glorious. We cannot get our beautiful garments from the ecclesiastical furniture-shops. There is only One from whom the gold and the white raiment can be bought, and they cannot be bought with money. No. It is not finer windows, or more elegant structures, or better music that we want so badly. These are not the chief things, though it must be owned they have their importance, and have scarcely received the attention they deserve. Still, they are not the chief things. A Church may be clothing itself abundantly with all manner of outward fineries ; it may have become a very pretty plaything for young ladies of leisure ; and yet it may be wholly destitute of the beauty of the Lord. What is, then, this beauty of the Lord ?

It is, in the first place, the beauty of naturalness. What is unreal must always be ugly—at least when there is the least suspicion of its genuineness. And the more beautiful it pretends to be the more abhorrent it is to those who discern the imposture. The first necessity is to be real. Unless we are willing to be honest, and trying to be our plain, simple selves, there is no hope that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with us. And is there not some need for amendment here ? We are Nonconformists in part because we will not make believe, because we are resolved to be sincere and straightforward men whatever the cost may be. That is well. But is it not possible to carry this admirable principle still a little farther ? Can we not be a

little more frank, more simple? There is the sermon. Mr. Froude explains the approval accorded to Carlyle's Edinburgh address by pointing out that in that address the old doctrines had lost their fire. They were there, but they were "reduced to the level of Church sermons; thrown into general propositions which it is pretty and right and becoming to confess with our lips, while no one is supposed to act on them. Carlyle, people felt with a sense of relief, meant only what the preachers meant, and was a fine fellow after all." That is bitter sarcasm. But it may be less wise to resent it with indignation than to ask with humility whether we may not be a little more careful to make such insinuations impossible. It is a terrible thing when what professes to be a message from Christ should come to be held up as a type of unreality. Now we may claim, perhaps, that we are clear in this matter. But it may be there are yet affectations and conventionalities by which the sermon is disfigured, and which ought to be torn away with a resolute hand. How beautiful is honesty of speech! What is more refreshing, what is there that touches us more swiftly or deeply, tired as we are of flights of rhetoric and floods of eloquence, than to hear a man say simply what he really thinks and strongly feels? How the heart warms to a man who so speaks! How readily you forgive him all his oratorical defects! This is surely the first thing to aim at. No doubt it is hard to be natural. It requires self-suppression. It requires some courage. It is, perhaps, impossible for those upon whom Truth has not shone in its majesty, and who are without

any vivid sense of an Invisible Presence and a Divine Master. But it is within our reach, and our first great struggle must be to attain to it.

Then there is the prayer and the hymn. How very helpful our prayer meetings might be if we would only say simply what is in our minds, as some of the poorer people do when they are stirred by religious feeling! Why should we not be as real and natural in our intercourse with God as in our familiar, fireside talk? It would be far more reverent than any approach to insincerity. The great God cannot care for those nicely turned sentences and pretty conceits which have no heart in them. He would rather we were honest with Him. He would rather we told Him the whole truth, in the simplest language. He would rather we called things by their common names than waste so much ingenuity in finding equivalent expressions which a false taste may deem to be more suitable. What a mistake it is, all this circumlocution! How one wearies of it! Why, if the brethren would but consider, in all seriousness, for five brief minutes what they really did think, or feel, or desire, and would utter it in plain English, our prayer meetings would be beautiful services indeed—not, it is true, in the sense in which a cathedral service is beautiful, but in a deeper and nobler sense. There would be no meetings then that would attract us so much. There would be no place under heaven invested with a charm so holy as the place where prayer was wont to be made.

And the hymns! Would it not be possible for us to put a little more true meaning into our hymns?

What do they mean, some of them, as ordinarily sung? If you pause and ask yourself, you can hardly find an answer. You are almost tempted to say, "This sounds very sweet; it is nicely rendered; but it surely means nothing." The words are not words either of praise or of prayer. They are the record of quite exceptional spiritual experiences. But no one can believe for a moment that they are the experiences of the bulk of the cheerful-looking and comfortable seat-holders who are singing so lustily. Or they are words of exhortation, of entreaty, of warning. But who are being exhorted, entreated, warned? Oh, they are exquisite hymns no doubt, and they are sung to lovely tunes, and in fine, artistic fashion! But somehow, one feels that there is something a little artificial about it all. It is not worship. It is not prayer. One scarcely knows what it is. Perhaps there would be less sense of unreality if such hymns were sung as solos. The matter at least wants looking into.

But we want naturalness and reality to be carried farther than this. We need to deal with each other more frankly. We are too much afraid of each other. We belong to the same Church, but we put each other off. We conceal our true selves behind conventional speeches, and there is nothing beautiful in that. There is, indeed, a reticence which is seemly, and an effusiveness which repels. It is hateful when men are for ever babbling of religious experiences which are shallow at the best. But neither is it good when they starve their inward life for lack of timely speech, or of that sympathy which is the reward of frank confession. What

ought the Churches to do? They ought to let the Sun of Righteousness pour down upon them His warm rays till they begin to thaw, and the frozen fountains of holy thought and sentiment are set flowing once more with a musical murmur, in genial and reviving streams.

And yet in openness and candour alone there is little beauty to be found. Thank God for the candid friend, if he be a friend indeed. But the candour, without the friendliness—it is an abomination. It is love after all which is the essentially beautiful thing. All Christ's disciples are known by this—that they love one another. And they must learn to love one another before they set out to evangelize the world or embark on ambitious philanthropies. Moreover, their love must not be a matter of words only. Christ will not be put off by words. We are to love one another as He loved us. And His love took the form of patient, kindly, considerate service. He kneeled down and washed His disciples' feet. That is love, according to His interpretation of it. And are we obeying His commandment in our Churches? Are we following His example? Are we "receiving" one another, as He received us? Do we really care at all for those who belong to the same fellowship with ourselves, if they are not our personal friends, or do not happen to please our fancy? Do we try to care about such people? Do we trouble to take any sort of interest in them? Do we know where they live, what they do, what their names are? Do we ever wonder whether any of them are sad—poor souls!—struggling, tempted, lonely, disappointed, over-

worked, always in pain, miserably poor? We are affectionate towards those that belong to our private households. But the household of faith! how near does that larger family lie to our hearts? What thought have we for those people who live in dreary lodgings, those young fellows who gave themselves in a moment of quickened feeling to Christ and to us, but have found it much harder work to be Christians than they fancied; those old men and old women who lie waiting in patience for the hour of their release? All this, it will be said, is the minister's business. But it is not his alone. It is the Church's business. And the first step in any Forward Movement is for the Church to attempt to realize more perfectly its own gracious ideal. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God (holy and beloved), bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." This is the call to the Church. These are the beautiful garments that it becomes us to put on. Here is the pure gold, and here is the white raiment which the daughter of Zion is to wear. Let such great gifts be ours, and we shall shine in the beauty of the Lord, and we may be well content.

To my mind our first duty is to repent of our evil ways, to put from us whatever is unreal and unworthy of our high calling, to renounce that foolish pride which knows nothing of the Cross, and that caste spirit which makes the very name of

fellowship a mockery, and that pitiable bondage to custom and tradition which so ill accords with the liberty of which we boast, and that accursed love of self which is the ruin of our souls. Is it demanded of us what we shall do? Let us be sorry for all these sins, and come back to Christ, and humble ourselves before Him, and pray for grace to do the first works. Then we may hope that He will create us anew in His own image, and we shall be glorified with the glory of the New Jerusalem, which has no earthly origin, and owes nothing to human skill, or genius, but is fashioned by the Eternal Spirit, and descends out of Heaven from God.

X.—THE DEATH OF JUDAS ISCARIOT¹

And he cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.—MATT. xxvii. 5.

THAT was the end of this unhappy man's career. Covetousness, associated, as some people think, with impatience and presumption—impatience of what seemed to be the slow methods, long delays, and even the timidity and indecision of Jesus, and presumption which did not scruple to force on the crisis which was so much desired—covetousness, at any rate, had led to betrayal, and betrayal had brought on remorse, and the end of remorse was suicide. When he found that Jesus was convicted he repented and threw down those miserable pieces of silver on the Temple floor and went out and hanged himself. Poor, despairing soul! We are very ready to condemn him; that, no doubt, is our first impulse—to speak indignantly and with resentment of him and his deed. It is wonderful how ready we are to condemn people, especially wonderful, I think, when we consider how very apt we are ourselves to go astray and do what is wrong. “In many things we offend all”; but that does not seem to deter us from condemning other people who have gone

¹ Preached in the Clapton Park Congregational Chapel, on Sunday evening, November 14, 1880.

wrong, as readily and as easily as though it were our business and duty to condemn them, and as though it were altogether out of the question that anybody could bring a charge against ourselves of doing anything amiss. If Christ had said "Judge," instead of "Judge not," how widely He would be obeyed in the world to-day, and even in the Church ! If these words were not written so distinctly in our Bibles, one would almost think His followers had misunderstood Him, and had taken Him to say the opposite of what He did say, so ready are we with our condemnation and denunciation of those who have done wrong. Judas, at any rate, we are very ready to denounce and condemn because of his heinous deed. Shameful, terrible, we say, unprecedented was his crime. One of the old commentators, after giving his theory of the precise cause which led to the death of Judas, goes on to say that "his death was just in accordance with the deserts of this wicked wretch, for that his wickedness was beyond all example." I do not know that we should speak in these days exactly in that strain even of Judas, yet it is not unlikely that our first feeling in thinking of him will be one of resentment, and that our words will be words of bitter condemnation. But when we come to reflect, when we look upon that sight, the like of which no man ought to be able to look upon without feelings of awe, the sight of his lifeless body ; when we see him lying there dead, dead by his own hand, and dead because of a despair which made life insupportable to him ; and when we consider what his history had been, and what his circumstances, what had been possible to him,

what he might have done, what he might have been ; when we consider all these things, then I am not sure that our feeling in regard to him will not be rather a feeling of pity than of indignation ; that we shall not be moved rather by the sadness of his fate, by the pity of it, even by the pathos of it, than by the blackness of his crime, black though it had been. There is no sadder sight in the world, I think, than the sight of one who has died by his own hand when the deed has been done not through insanity but through sheer despair and misery. You have such a sense of miscarriage, of complete failure, of utter waste, that it stirs all your impulses of pity. Things seem to have gone so terribly wrong. One of our poets describes in some verses, which I dare say will be familiar to many of you, a visit which he paid to the Morgue in Paris, that melancholy little building where the bodies of those who have been drowned in the Seine are exposed in order that they may be identified by their friends. When he went there there were three bodies of persons who on the previous day had found the burden of life intolerable ; and the first feeling that comes into his mind is one, I think, that very easily engages our sympathy. As he looks upon all that is left of these three men he says :

Poor men, God made, and all for that !

That feeling is one that easily engages our sympathy. And that is the sort of feeling that we are not unlikely to have when we contemplate the fate of Judas. " Poor man," we are likely to say, " God made, and all for that ! " God made ; he had begun well,

as all men do ; he had come from God, as we all do. Not so long before he had been a little child with all the possibilities of a fair and virtuous life—a life successful and prosperous in the highest sense of the word—which belong to every little child, and the thought of which so often saddens us when it seems to us that there is very little chance of their being realized. He had been a little innocent child not very long before this ; and he seems to have been one with special gifts and capacities which might have been developed and matured and devoted to the highest purposes. Then the time came when he looked upon that face, one sight of which would be a privilege that we should not know well how to estimate, and when he heard the tones of that voice, which would be better worth hearing, we should think, than any music we could listen to, when he came across the path of Jesus Christ. And, moreover, the time came when he was called to the discipleship of Christ, brought into fellowship with Him, made His servant, made his friend. What a chance he had ! “ He was numbered with us,” says St. Peter, “ and had part in this ministry.” What might he not have made himself, or what might not have been made of him if he had only used his opportunity aright ? What might he not have become who was brought into such close relations with Christ ? What was not possible for him ? Everything seemed to be possible for him. How holy he might have become in time if he had only been willing to receive upon his spirit the impress of the spirit of Christ ! And how strong he might have become if he had only opened his

moral nature to the inspiring influence of Christ. And how gentle and how wise he might have become if he had only been content to sit at the feet of Christ and learn of Him who was so willing and so competent to teach him. What a man he might have been ; what a work he might have done. What a mark he might have made in the world ! He might have been one of the world's greatest benefactors, and his name might have come down to us to-day covered with glory and honour. And now there he lies, a dishonoured corpse, ruined, wrecked, and his bishopric must be taken by another. Poor man ! Made by God, called by Christ, called to a part in the ministry of Christ, and " all for that ! " It is very pitiful.

But pity for him should not be the only emotion that should possess us when we contemplate his miserable fate. This thought should also come into our minds—the thought of the possibility that is open to every man, to every one of us, of making a mistake like his, and being involved at last in similar ruin. Of course, it is not possible for us to betray Christ in the same way that Judas betrayed his Master, and it is not very likely that we shall commit suicide as he committed suicide. And yet it is possible to betray even Christ, and there is a certain kind of suicide, not just the same kind as that of which Judas was guilty, but a kind that is very real, very terrible, that is not so uncommon in the world that we can afford altogether to put aside its possibility in our own history. Lives are being wasted, souls are being wrecked every day ; and if we are quite secure, it is well for us to be sure that

we are secure, but at the same time not to be too sure of it. You remember that when our Lord told His disciples that one of them should betray Him they said to Him one after the other, "Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I?" Sometimes we have wondered how they should ask that question, how the possibility ever could have suggested itself to their minds of betraying their Master. We could never have asked such a question, we think; it could never have occurred to us that we could betray Him. But possibly they were more wise than we should have been, or possibly we could have been as wise as they under the circumstances. Perhaps at that time they understood more distinctly than we understand at ordinary times how near those who seem to be strongest and holiest very often are to great shame and great sin. Perhaps at that moment, awed as they must have been by the solemnity of their Master's manner, by the sense of some great impending disaster which they were not able to define to their own minds, they were in a mood to suspect themselves. And let me say that suspicion in regard to oneself, the habit of questioning and suspecting one's own heart, is a very salutary habit to acquire. When we are greatly shocked and horrified, it may be, by the contemplation of some great spiritual disaster, some great moral shipwreck, some terrible wickedness that has been committed, it is safer for us, wiser, better, in all ways, to be questioning ourselves than to be condemning fiercely those who have gone so terribly astray. "We could never sin like that," we say; "it would be impossible for me to do such a thing as that." We shudder at the

very thought of it ; but have we considered all the force of a sudden and fierce temptation that might sweep down upon us in a moment like a great mountain flood and carry everything before it ? And have we considered what our position and peril might be in times of despondency, times of ill-health, times of reaction after seasons of great excitement ? And are we sure that there are no tendencies within us that are carrying us in the direction of that great wickedness at the thought of which we shudder to-day ? And are we sure that there are no seeds planted in the garden of our souls which are growing up slowly, it may be imperceptibly, yet still growing, which may, before long, become rank and poisonous weeds that may wither and destroy all the ripening fruit and every fair flower ? We are a long way off from the precipice to-day—thank God for that. But are we so certain that we have not been taking steps lately which have been bringing us nearer to the verge, so that unless our course is arrested there will come a time—perhaps before long—when we shall find ourselves falling, falling into the abyss of moral degradation ? Men are not lost in a moment ; it is always a gradual thing, or almost always. It was by little and little, you remember, that the children of Israel came into the possession of the Promised Land ; it is by little and little, by slow and imperceptible degrees, that men rise to the heights of moral and spiritual holiness ; it is by little and little, by slow and imperceptible degrees, that men sink down into the abyss of shame and moral perdition. Who ever made up his mind that he would ruin himself in

body and soul? Who knows altogether at any moment what way he is going, what he is doing, in what direction he is tending? Who understands himself altogether? You remember how it was with Babylon. The inhabitants were keeping high festival, and it was not until Cyrus had worked his way into the heart of the city through the dry river-bed and through the water-gate that the inhabitants of the city realized that anything was wrong. And that is how sin finds its way into our hearts. Very stealthily it comes in by some unguarded door. We do not recognize it at first, but it comes, and it strengthens itself and settles itself, it establishes itself within us, it becomes stronger and stronger, and then suddenly there comes the revelation, the collapse, and the citadel is taken. So that we are not to be too sure of ourselves, and we may well profit by the example even of Judas.

But how is it likely, it may be said, that we could at all sin in the way in which he sinned? How is it likely that any of us could be involved in a ruin that may be at all compared to the ruin of Judas? Let me briefly sketch a career that it is possible for us at least to conceive. Here is a man who is born into the world of to-day, a man, or one who has the making of a man. He is a man, and that is something not to be lightly esteemed—to be endowed with those wonderful capacities that are entrusted to our race, to belong to this exalted order in the creation. He is a man. More than that, perhaps he has some special gifts, some peculiar endowments; he has a vivid and powerful imagination; he has a resolute will; he has a keen intelligence; he can

feel deeply ; he is not an ordinary man. Then he has the advantages of education ; he has access to the noblest books ; he has the examples of heroic and saintly men brought constantly before him ; he has good teachers ; he has been brought up in a home which is just what we would wish every home to be ; he has had wise men to guide him. It may be, too, that he has also the advantages to some extent of rank, wealth, and position. And better than that, much better, he has seen that heavenly vision which everybody who lives in a Christian country and under Christian influences must see, more or less dimly, once at any rate. He has seen, though it be perhaps only by glimpses, here and there what it means to be a true Christian, what goodness is, according to the teaching and example of Christ. He has met with Christ, and further, he has been called by Christ ; he has heard the voice of Christ speaking to him ; he has had impulses leading him towards Christ and Christian discipleship ; and the Spirit of God has been not far from him. That Divine Spirit has come down to him ; He has been willing to enter into his heart and make it His abode. All these things have been at his disposal, given to him—the love of God, the power of God, the life of God, the fellowship of God, the service of God in this world, life eternal with God hereafter. All these things have been put within his reach. What a magnificent success he may achieve, how high he may rise, and so, what a failure is possible for him, how low he may sink. Who shall determine his destiny ? Who is to say what is to become of him ? He must determine

for himself, he must choose for himself. He does choose for himself ; he has chosen ; and you see, looking at his life to-day, what his choice has been. He has been wasting his life ; he is wasting it to-day ; he is missing his chance ; he is letting the great opportunity slip. Is it not so ? Just consider what he is doing with all those gifts which have been bestowed upon him, of brain and heart. Is anybody the better for them ? Is anybody the happier ? Is the cause of Christ advanced because of them ? What has he been doing with them ? He has been wasting them ; he has not been using them at all ; they have been declining, withering away ; he has been losing them because he has not been calling them into exercise at all, or he has been using them for purposes altogether unworthy, and that is a waste ; or else he has been using them (and this is the worst waste of all) for purposes that are vicious and bad. He has been wasting those gifts and losing the chances that they gave him. How has he been profiting by all the influences to which he has been subject from the beginning, by the holy and inspiring examples that have been before him, and by all the education he has received ? Why, all these things have been thrown away upon him, he is none the better for them at all. What has he been doing with the grace of God which has been given or offered without measure to him ? He has been doing despite unto it. It has been wasted. And what has he been doing with Christ ? What did the Jews do with Christ ? They took Him away out of the city and crucified Him, and that is what he has been doing with Christ. He has had nothing to do with

Him ; he has put Him aside, he has refused to hear His voice. He has trodden under foot the Son of God. The precious blood of Christ, so far as he is concerned, has been wasted. And there he is to-day, a prosperous man, a man who has made his way in the world, a man who is of some importance in society, a prosperous man in the eyes of the world, but a ruined man in the eyes of God. All the Divine affections, all the holy impulses, all the pure desires within him are crushed, crushed by his own hand, crushed by his own neglect and wantonness. He is blind now to the heavenly vision, blind to all that is beautiful and Divine. He is deaf to all those heavenly voices by which God speaks to those who are willing to hear. He is a man of the world emphatically ; he enjoys life, he can joke with his friends, he is easy and comfortable, but he has lost his God. Whatever may be his hope for the future, whatever may be his chances of recovery, for the present, at any rate, he has lost his God. "Poor man ! God made"—made in His own image, made for Divine communion, made for heavenly service, made for eternal felicity—"and all for that !" There he is to-day, without a thought above the pleasures of the table, or above the pursuits of business, or above the poor amusements that make up his life. He is little more than an animal ; he has gone down ; the opportunity that he has had he has lost. And is not that betrayal ? And is not that suicide ? Is it not betrayal to deal in that way with the most precious gifts which God gives to us, which He gives in order that we may make the most of them, in order that we may cultivate them by our

use of them—to trample them under foot, to make light of them, to throw them away—these precious holy things which God has given to us—is not that betrayal? If you squander the property of which you have been appointed trustee, you think that is treachery; and are we not traitors if we neglect and scorn and trample under foot this spiritual nature, this mysterious, wonderful, holy nature, which God has given to us that we may cultivate and develop it? And is it not betrayed if we, having looked upon Jesus Christ, and professed, as we all, no doubt, profess, to believe in Him, to trust in Him, to love Him, are all the time so living in the world, so contradicting, practically, the Divine precepts, so giving the lie to all that Christ has said, as that we are delivering Him over into the hands of His enemies, and causing them to triumph? Is not that betrayal? Are we not also betraying Him with a kiss, speaking well of Him, calling ourselves by His name, and not doing the things which He says? Then as to suicide. Men who fling away after that fashion God's holiest gifts do not often go and hang themselves; their temptation does not lie in that direction; and yet they may be very truly said to be suicides. What is suicide? Self-destruction. And what is self? Is it one's body? Surely it is one's spirit as much as one's body. And if it be suicide to destroy one's body, it is also suicide to destroy one's soul. What else is it? If a man allows his heart to become hard and unfeeling and cold; if he allows it to become so corrupt that all vision of Divine things is blotted out; if he so checks the currents of sympathy and love that the very

fountains are exhausted ; if he suppresses all the higher sensibilities and instincts ; if by his wilfulness and carelessness and wantonness and selfishness he crucifies the Christ that is being born within him, is not that suicide ? Is not that laying violent hands on himself ? Is not that making away with himself ? Ah ! it is possible for you and me and for everybody to betray Christ and to commit suicide, to destroy our spiritual nature, to make away with ourselves by despising and neglecting that which is noblest and highest and Divinest within us. May God avert that fate from us ! God has told us what is the true loss and what is the true gain, and how we ought to live if we would make life a success. Side by side with this career of Judas there runs another career. It is the career of One who calls us to follow Him, and who, if we do follow Him, will lead us to victory and glory. They always win who side with Christ, not apparently at first always, perhaps not to outward appearance at all, but they do win at last. They lose, but they lose in order that they may gain ; they suffer, but the suffering they endure is not worthy to be compared with the glory and blessedness that shall follow. It is Christ whom it is our true wisdom to follow. There is all the difference in the world between Christ and Judas. Christ gave Himself away. Judas threw himself away. Men in the world to-day are just doing one or the other ; they are flinging themselves away, wasting themselves by living for themselves, or else they are giving themselves away for the service of man and the service of God, surrendering their lives to God,

losing their lives, and so truly gaining them, and gaining them for ever. May God help us every one to follow faithfully every day, and in all things, Him who will lead us on, although it be, perhaps, "through much tribulation," to triumph and glory and felicity at last.

XI.—THE HOUSE OF THE LORD †

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord.—PSALM cxxii. 1.

THERE is something very beautiful in the feeling which the pious Jew had for the House of the Lord. One of the most affecting psalms in the whole collection is that forty-second Psalm, the cry of some sad-hearted exile who looks towards Jerusalem from the slopes of Hermon, and thinks of the Temple, and of those happy days when he was able to join with the worshippers at the great festivals, and appear there in Zion before God.

And what deep emotion there is, what a spirit of longing—of longing which is happily soon to be satisfied—in the eighty-fourth Psalm, the song of the pilgrims who are on their way to the sacred city, and are so full of joy in the anticipation of all that is before them that they forget the weariness of the way, and find even the vale of weeping to be a place of green pastures and bubbling springs. They were glad when an opportunity came to them of going to the House of the Lord; and there was nothing that grieved them more than to be shut out from the

† A sermon preached before the Congregational Union of Scotland at Edinburgh, May 2, 1905.

privileges and delights of that holy place. All this is very beautiful to see.

And it may be that we find it a little depressing to turn away from these Hebrew songs, so full of love and of loyalty and of longing and regret, that we may listen to the inquiry which is so often being made nowadays, and of which we may well be growing tired, the inquiry as to why people do not go to church. I am not going to pursue that inquiry this evening. I dare say it would be easy to find plenty of reasons if we went searching for them, and the search, perhaps, would not be wholly profitless ; but I would rather ask, not why men do not go to church, but why should they go ?

I may say, however, that when we compare the zeal of these pious Hebrews with the apathy of which we complain to-day, there are two things that may be borne in mind.

First, we may remember that there is no reason to suppose that in those ancient days all the people felt about the House and the worship of God just as those particular men felt who wrote the psalms to which I have referred. You must not judge of the general feeling by the utterances of a few devout souls. I do not doubt that there were worldly people then who cared as little for the Temple services as so many do, apparently, for the services in our churches to-day.

And another thing to be noted is, that whatever may be the extent to which indifference and estrangement prevail in our own time—and, of course, they do prevail to an extent which is greatly to be regretted—there are yet very many, even in these

degenerate days, who care for the Church with an affection as sincere and as devout as that which the Jews felt for their Temple. There is something admirable and worthy of all respect, as it seems to me, in the love which so many Anglicans feel for their mother Church. And we who are not Anglicans should, indeed, be displaying a churlish spirit if we could not appreciate that attachment and devotion. We may wish sometimes that along with it we could find a somewhat more cordial recognition of what is true and excellent in other communions. But I could forgive a little narrowness and blindness in those who are, it may be, too exclusive in their devotion to the Church of their childhood, just as I would not quarrel with the man who maintained that there was not, and never could be, any woman to be compared with his own mother.

And it is not only among the Anglicans that this feeling of strong and jealous affection is to be found. You find it also among the Nonconformists. You will come upon pious people—if you know where to look for them—who love their little chapel with a love that may seem to you to be quite amazing. You may not see in that little chapel anything that interests you in the very smallest degree. You may complain, probably with too much justice, that it is entirely destitute of any pretensions to architectural beauty. You may even describe it as an eyesore in the village, that ugly, staring little Bethel. And if you were to attend one of the services, which perhaps you would not be greatly tempted to do, you might say that it was all very dull and poor ; that it was not at all a nice service. And yet you

may find people there to whom that forbidding little meeting-house in the back street is beautiful as Mount Zion, and who love every stone of it. You see, they are idealists. They look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. They are like those pilgrims who did not see the sand and the rock of the desert at all, but had visions flashing on the inward eye which made their hearts glad and their steps buoyant. That homely little chapel is endeared to them by the tenderest associations and memories. It has often been a true Bethel to them. It has been a Holy Mount. It has been a Gethsemane. It has been like the upper chamber at Jerusalem. It may be nothing better than a barn to look at ; but what does that matter to them ? It is the House of the Lord, and they love it, and will love it for ever. And they do not like to have it touched. Sometimes, you will say, they carry their conservatism too far. Very likely that is true. They will resent your suggested improvements. They do not want new pews, or new galleries, or new hymn-books, or new anything. And they may be a little selfish in what you condemn as their foolish sentiment. But do not be too hard on that kind of sentiment. Deal gently with it ; firmly, if need be ; but gently, as you would deal gently with the Anglican who has such a blind fondness for his own Church that he cannot believe there is any other Church that is worth calling a Church in the whole world.

Well, but now, is there any reason in sentiment of this kind, whether ancient or modern ? Why should we care so much for the Church ? Why should we

be glad when men say to us, " Let us go unto the House of the Lord ? " Many people are anything but glad when such an invitation is addressed to them. Why should we be glad ? Let me suggest some answers to that question.

It must be understood that by the Church is meant not the building merely, but the Institution ; just as when we speak of the House of Commons we do not mean the chamber, but the men who meet in it, with all their privileges and powers. And let it be assumed, also, that we are religious men at heart ; that we want to live near to God and to please Him, and to make in all ways the best possible use of our lives. With this understanding, let me ask why the House of the Lord should have any attraction for us ?

Now, if we put ourselves in the position of the Jews who cared so much for the Temple, we shall see that its supreme attraction for them lay in the fact that in some special sense God, as they believed, was present in it. To enter into the Temple was, to them, to appear before God. They could not see Him. They knew that no human eye could look upon His majesty. But they felt, as they passed through the gates, and drew near the Holy of Holies, that there He was, hidden from mortal sight, but very near. There was but the veil between them and that awful, that glorious, Presence. Yes, great and inscrutable as was the mystery of it all, there was God. That was the thought that made them look towards Jerusalem so wistfully when they were far away, and tremble with such holy excitement as they went up to the city of their solemnities

to worship. The glory of Jerusalem was that God was in the midst of her.

Now, it may be said that we have nothing like that to attract us in our modern Christian Churches. We may argue that God no longer inhabits any temple made with hands, and that He is not in the church any more than in the street or the workshop or the drawing-room. And we may put the argument in such a way as to make out what looks like a very good case.

But is the argument quite sound? Is there nothing in our churches that corresponds to that Mystery of the Divine Presence in the Jewish Temple? Many, of course, will say that there is something, and that the sacred wafer on the altar in the new dispensation corresponds to the Shekinah in the old dispensation. And, cherishing that belief, they will claim, as they do sincerely feel, that the church is invested with a very peculiar sanctity.

In the summer of last year I was spending a Sunday in a little Austrian town, and, after attending the Anglican service in the morning, I looked in on the way home at the Roman Catholic church. It was empty but for one person, a lady, who had been with us at the Church of England service, and whom we found there kneeling, evidently in devout recognition of the Host, the presence of which was indicated by the dimly burning light on the altar. When I saw her I think perhaps my first feeling was one of impatience and irritation at what seems only a piece of superstitious sentiment. And I will not say that such a feeling was not to be justified.

And yet, can you not sympathize with the instinct which prompts a man to draw near to the Divine, however you may believe him to be mistaken in the way in which he seeks to satisfy the instinct? I, at least, should be sorry to condemn unsparingly anyone who longs, however ignorantly, to be where Christ is. It would be so good to touch, though it were but the hem of His garment. And rather than sit in judgment on those who are, I may think, wholly mistaken in their idea as to the mode under which God makes Himself present in the church, I would inquire whether I myself, and those who think with me, are recognizing His presence in any truer and more spiritual way.

Now, in theory at least, we do recognize the presence of Christ in our Churches. For one of the great foundation truths on which our church polity is based is the truth that wherever two or three are met together in Christ's name there is He in the midst. How often have we heard that text quoted in defence of our ecclesiastical position! And who shall blame us? For it may quite reasonably and justly be quoted for such a purpose. But what a poor thing, what a pitiable thing it is, if that is the only use to which we are putting it! Surely, surely, it is too glorious a truth to be employed solely as a controversial weapon, as a missile to be flung at an opponent! Surely we are sadly the losers if we are content to look at it only in that light! Why do we not let it mean something in our religious life and experience? Why do we not let it mean what it must mean—that there is some special sense in which Christ is present when His

friends are gathered together, just as there was some special sense in which God was believed to be present in the Holy of Holies, though the Heaven of Heavens could not contain Him? Is it not a thing much to be lamented that our beliefs and principles, which we are so ready to fight for and so anxious to propagate, should be of so little practical value to ourselves?

Well, if that great saying of our Lord's means what we claim that it does mean when we are in the mood for controversy, does it not furnish us with the best of all reasons why we should go to church when we are in the mood for worship—a mood which I trust is not altogether unfamiliar to us? You may not think there is any spiritual profit in going into a mere building, though it may have been duly consecrated. You may not believe that any real significance is to be attached to the lamp that burns on the altar. But will you not appreciate the significance of the occasion when those who are truly Christ's people are met together in His name? For where His people are, there He is. The place of meeting may be humble enough. But what does that matter? I have no doubt the upper chamber was a poor and homely place in comparison with the Temple, with all its solemnities and splendours. But who would not choose that upper room in preference to any temple in the world? The friends who are gathered together may not be very grand people. But who will care about that if they are His friends? For He Himself is always to be found among his friends, be they ever so humble and poor.

This is one good and sufficient reason why we may well be glad when it is said to us, "Let us go unto the House of the Lord."

And if we have any true and deep religious feeling we shall be glad to go because we shall be wanting the sympathy of those who are like-minded with ourselves.

In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd, when he comes back home in triumph, calls his neighbours together that they may rejoice with him in his happiness. Now what was the good of doing that? Why could he not be content with his good fortune without making so much ado? Well, if you ask what practical end was to be gained by calling his friends about him I do not know that it is easy to give you a satisfactory answer. The best answer is that it was just human nature. We are made like that, most of us. There may be some who are able to keep all their feelings to themselves, and some who prefer to do it, but most men have social instincts. They do not like to be alone in their joy or in their sorrow. They want friends who will rejoice with them when they rejoice, and weep with them when they weep. And so if we ever feel deeply that God has done great things for us, if ever we are stirred by the thought of all that we owe to our Lord Jesus Christ, if our hearts are ever full of praise and full of prayer, then we shall find ourselves saying what the old saints used to say, "O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together. O come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." The man who never feels that it is a

good thing to join with his friends in some common expression of praise to God has grave reason to doubt whether there can be very much praise in his own heart.

The desire for the sympathy of our fellows in the most sacred of all emotions, and the most glorious of all the acts of which the soul of man is capable, should be motive enough to carry us to the House of Prayer if we have any genuine devoutness of spirit.

And how much there is that might be said of its beneficent and manifold ministries. It is for one thing a peaceable habitation and quiet resting-place. "The first feeling that we have on entering a church," wrote the late Dr. Jowett, "is one of peace and repose." If that is so, and if the feeling remains, and is not quickly dispersed, as sometimes I fear it is, it should be good for many of us to find our way to such a house as this. For, placed and occupied as we are in this world, we are often in need of quieting and restoring influences. Life is not very easy with most people, perhaps less easy than we imagine, for I have noted a look of anxious care on faces that you might think should show no such signs, and I have seen tears spring suddenly from eyes that one had thought had little cause to weep. The heavy-laden have never been in the minority, I suspect. And I am sure there are many to whom it should be a relief to turn away from the distraction and tumult of the world, and enter into some quiet place where there are no loud voices, and no hurryings to and fro, and no jarring discords—a place where there is a subduing sense of eternal

things, where men may hide themselves, as it were, in the secret of God's presence from all the toil, and tribulation, and tumult of the war, and may hear those calm words of gentleness and power which bid the storm subside and the waves be still. We do not often call our churches sanctuaries nowadays. We feel, perhaps, that it would savour of affectation to describe them so. And yet the church is, or might be, and should be, a true sanctuary in the sense of being a refuge for all such as are harassed and overdriven.

Then there is so much that one may learn in the House of the Lord. There are many things that are strange and painful to us till we go into the Sanctuary of God. There are many mysteries the burden of which weighs upon the mind until we find ourselves in the Holy Place. I think that must be not an uncommon experience. Of course, I know that much may now be learned in school, or from books, or newspapers, which in former days could only be learned in the church. And I know that there are those who will plead that they can read better sermons at home than they are at all likely to hear in any ordinary pulpit. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that it is worth while going to church for the sake of the truth that may flash upon you there. It is not a question simply of the amount or quality of the teaching that may be contained in the sermon. It may be something in the lesson, in a hymn, in a prayer. It may be something that steals into your mind unbidden as you sit quietly musing. "It has happened," says a recent writer, speaking of the reading of the Gospel in church,

“ it has happened—one knows not how—it will doubtless happen again—one cannot tell when—that as the verses follow one another, suddenly, out of the well-known story, there comes a strange, thrilling sense of heights and depths never before scaled or plumbed. Something in the air, something in ourselves, something, it may be, in the voice of the reader, in sunny mornings, in country churches, when the scent and sound of summer come through open windows, in the equable atmosphere of some vast minster when the words spoken at the lectern are encompassed with stillness—under all varying circumstances, defying calculation and explanation—the new comes out of the old, the passion out of the commonplace, and we say within ourselves, ‘This thing is of God.’” Such experiences, even though they should be rare, are so precious and memorable as to afford ample repayment to the church-goer, and due compensation for some things that he may find to be less profitable.

Nor is it light only, or peace only, that we may look for in the House of God, but inspiration, energy and power that fit us for all that has to be done day by day. If we are not the stronger for meeting our comrades and fellow-labourers, and joining with them in prayer, and looking into their faces, there must be something deplorably wrong. But many of you will bear witness, I am certain, that again and again you have been made stronger. You have come to church feeling that your work was difficult, and the obstacles formidable, and the prospect dubious. You have come, out of heart,

dispirited and sad, and you have gone away again in an altogether different mood. You have been set upon a rock, and your goings have been established, and a new song has been put into your mouth. You have heard a voice which bade you be of good cheer. You have been lifted up into a new world. You have been able almost to rejoice and glory in your difficulties. The Lord has sent you help from the sanctuary. Something was said, or there was a look on someone's face, or some thought that came into your mind, that changed the whole aspect of life for you, and filled you with courage and hope.

And there is yet another influence that we owe to the House of God which is a little difficult perhaps to define.

You will remember how it is said that Daniel, when he was in Babylon, prayed at a window in his house that lay open towards Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not visible, of course. It was five hundred miles away, across the Assyrian plain. Still, he could feel as he looked through the open window that there, far off in the distance, was the sacred city of his love, and it helped him among all the temptations and idolatries by which he was surrounded to have that outlook. Well, I think the Church is like that window looking towards Jerusalem. It is like those delectable mountains from which the pilgrims fancied they could see something of the gate of the city. It is a witness of things eternal. It is a foretaste of the glory that is yet to be revealed. We come to ourselves when we come to church. We realize something of the vastness and splendour

of our inheritance. We breathe the air of heaven. We catch faint sounds of the celestial music. There are whispers that seem to come from God Himself. We are on the Mount of Transfiguration. We sit in the heavenly places.

“ Ah, but,” someone will say, “ this is quite a fancy picture that you are drawing. The ideal of the church may be beautiful and attractive enough, but where is the actual church that approaches anywhere near to the ideal ? We would go to church willingly if the churches were what they might be, but, being what they are, we confess that we are not greatly drawn to them.”

Well, I have this to say on that point, that it is for us, for every one of us, to help to make the church what it might be. There is no more solemn or imperative duty laid upon us than the duty of building up the Body of Christ, which means doing all that one can do to promote its well-being and increase its stability, its order, and its beauty. There is no one of us who is free from the obligation to contribute by his personal service in every possible way to the accomplishment of this great end. There may be justice in the complaint that the Church has done little for us. I do not know. It is conceivable that some part of the blame should be laid at our own door. But that is not the only question to be considered. No, nor the chief question to be considered. The chief question is, what am I doing for the Church ? We are in this world not to be ministered to, but to minister. And there is so much that every one of us can do if we choose. You can hinder the Church if you will. You can mar its beauty, and spoil its

worship, if you are so minded. In our Lord's time there were some who were doing that. There were some who were making it next to impossible to pray in the House which should have been pre-eminently the House of Prayer. There was such noise and clatter, such a spirit of greed and of bargaining, in the Temple courts that any poor hungry soul that wanted to pray would do better to betake himself to some shady garden or mountain slope than remain in the sacred precincts. The House of the Lord was being turned into a den of thieves. And we know how it vexed the heart of Jesus, and with what a storm of indignation He swept away those greedy and inconsiderate traffickers.

And we may play a part like that which was played by those merchants and money-changers if we will. By our carelessness, by our irreverence, by our ill-temper, by the spirit of bitterness, or envy, or strife, or proud aloofness, or wicked contempt, which we bring with us into the Household of God, we may rob the very Bride of Christ of her holy charm. We may spoil her usefulness, and humble her in the dust, and put her to shame before the eyes of a mocking world. It is appalling to think of the mischief that we may do in this way if we choose.

But, thank God, if we can hinder and betray and pull down, we can also help and build up. And there are few of our Churches that have not men and women within their borders who are doing this gracious and most beneficent work. They are not always the most important people, as importance is too often reckoned. Sometimes they are

poor in this world and obscure enough. But they bring the peace of God wherever they go. You cannot look into their faces without being lifted up. You cannot hear them speak without being brought nearer to God. They are healers and reconcilers. They create an atmosphere about them in which piety grows, and faith becomes strong, and love breaks into flower and bears its sweet and wholesome fruit. They are so gentle, so kind, so full of prayer, so quick in their sympathy, so warm in their approval, so tender in their pity. God bless them, these dear saints. If there were more of them the Church would be built up indeed, and we should fear no attacks that might be made upon it.

Do not, therefore, stand aloof from it, or serve it with a divided heart. You plead that you can do a great deal of useful work apart from Church life and Church fellowship. That is very likely. But what you can do outside is as nothing compared with what you can do inside. Within the sacred fellowship your influence and your opportunities will be multiplied a hundredfold. You will be placing yourself in contact with an instrument for blessing the world which will magnify every personal effort you put forth indefinitely. I do not think, therefore, that the Church, with all its faults, should be lightly esteemed by any of us. It ought not to have the second or third place in our interest and affections. Our Lord loved the Church and gave Himself for it. And we ought not to consent to give to it anything less than ourselves. So may God help us to play our part with all fidelity

and patience in order that through our toil and prayer and sacrifice the Church of His Son may become at last holy and without blemish, "a glorious Church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

XII.—THE NEW SONG

And they sung a new song saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof : for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.—REV. v. 9.

MUCH of the symbolism of the Book of Revelation may seem to our practical Western mind to be not very intelligible, and, perhaps, not very profitable. We may believe that it was interesting and helpful to those who were accustomed to such modes of presenting truth. But to us the simpler and more direct teaching of the Gospels, or the plain, straightforward narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, appeals with greater force.

And yet I do not think we can read some of these chapters without being struck, not merely by the beauty of their imagery and the splendour of their diction, but by their spiritual suggestiveness.

Take this fifth chapter, for instance, and the one which precedes it. In these two chapters there are, no doubt, many things that are not quite easy of interpretation, but there are also certain momentous truths, and great Christian principles, that are set before us in a very striking way, and that may be

even more impressive to some minds than if they were stated in abstract terms.

The Evangelist is caught up in spirit into the heavens. His mind had been full of the trouble and wickedness that were in this world of sin and sorrow, and no one can read any description of the world of that day, the world of the age of Nero, and wonder that the soul of such a man as St. John should be profoundly moved by the spectacle that was spread out before him. Such terrible things were happening, and seemed likely to happen, as might fill any good man's heart with grief and dismay, if not with despair. The *whole world* seemed to lie in wickedness. And we know that even in the condition of the Churches—in the condition, at any rate, of those seven Churches to which the counsels and warnings contained in the earlier chapters were addressed—there was much cause for anxiety. For there was only one of the seven in which there was not some serious mischief.

But in the fourth chapter the Apostle passes into another world. He looks up, and sees a door open in Heaven, and he hears a voice, as it were of a trumpet, saying "Come up hither."

And immediately he is in the Spirit. Things present and earthly fall away and disappear. He is, as it were, thrown into a holy trance. He sees the throne of the Universe, and Him that sits upon it, glorious as a jasper and sardius stone, and encircled by a rainbow. He sees other thrones also, on which are seated majestic beings arrayed in white robes, and with crowns on their heads. He sees the seven burning lamps before the throne which are the

seven spirits of God, and before the throne a glassy sea as clear as crystal, and round about the throne the four living creatures, mighty, swift, all-seeing, that rest not day or night but ever sing,

Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, which was and is, and is to come.

And he sees the four-and-twenty elders join in the song of praise, and fall down before Him that sits on the throne, and cast their crowns before Him, and magnify Him, the Creator, who is worthy to receive all honour, and power, and glory.

That is the opening scene in this celestial drama. There is nothing in it but majesty and splendour. All creation joins in one harmonious chant of praise to its Author, and there is nothing to mar the music, no sound of discord, not a jarring note.

But in the fifth chapter there comes a change. The song of praise to the Eternal as the world's Creator is ended. The elders are again on their thrones. And now in the right hand of Him who sits Lord over all there is a book written within and without, and sealed with seven seals. And an angel comes forward with a solemn challenge and cries, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" And there is silence. No one is found worthy. There is no one in the Heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, who is able to open the book, or to look thereon.

The secret of the Eternal must remain with Himself. There is none who may disclose it, none who may share it. "And I wept much," says the teller of this strange vision. "I wept much because

no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon." You cannot miss the meaning of those abundant tears. If there had been nothing but beauty, and order, and joy, throughout the whole creation of God, then that song, the strains of which have died away, need never have ended. But how much there is in the Creation besides beauty and order and joy. There is beauty : there is order : there is joy. But what else ? How much else there is. How much to bewilder and overwhelm us ! How much sorrow, how much anguish, how much shame. " We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." What a confession that is ! It has been said that if our sense of hearing were acute enough—we may be thankful it is not—we should hear from morn till eve, from one week's end to another, through all the days of our life, one persistent, never-ending cry of anguish from creatures in pain. There is a fact then that has to be taken into account. And what does it mean ? What is to be the end of it all ? Is there any hope for the world ? Is there any redemption to be wrought out somehow, at last, for which we may wait with what patience may be possible ? Is there any final consummation, any far-off Divine event, to which all this groaning and travailing creation is moving ? Why is sin permitted, and suffering, and death ? What has been the Creator's meaning, if He had any meaning in the creation of the world ? What was His ultimate purpose, if He had any ultimate purpose at all ? These are the great problems of life and destiny that no man can solve. These are the secrets hidden in that

volume of which no man may loose the seals. And when men think about these mysteries no wonder they are troubled. They cannot read the riddle of the painful earth. "I cannot praise this life, it looks so dark," wrote one whose old friend had died from some inward agony. It does indeed look dark sometimes, dark without any promise of dawn, without any faintest glimmer of light.

But John is raised from the mood of despair into which he has fallen. He is bidden not to weep. For the challenge is accepted: "Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." And he looks up—through his tears to see this mighty, all-victorious Prince, this invincible Champion who has come to deliver the world from that sad, insupportable burden of doubt and insoluble mystery. And what does he see? It is a strange, unexpected sight that meets his eyes. In the midst of the Throne, in the very heart and centre as it were of all things, he sees a Lamb standing, as it had been slain, not dead, erect rather, and with all the energy of life and power, but bearing the signs of suffering, and of death. And note what happens. He comes, this Lamb, with the marks of his anguish, and mortal wound. He comes and takes the book out of the hand of Him that sits upon the Throne. Here there is one who can read and interpret God's meaning. Here is one who shares the great secret of the ages, and who will make it known. Here is the Light of the World, the true Prophet of the Invisible. And as He takes the book there is a

fresh burst of song. Before Him all that great company before the Throne bows down in adoration. The harps which had been still are struck anew. The incense which is the prayer of saints arises. And there is to be heard, not that former hymn of a creation rejoicing, but a new song, a song of redemption.

Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof : for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests.

That is the song which is caught up through the courts of Heaven, and echoes again and again. There are the voices of many angels round the throne, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, and all saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And finally all the creation joins in. Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them—all the the groaning and travailing creation—"heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." That is the new song. It is a song in which we, no matter what may be our lot in this world, are invited to take our part.

There are, one may say, three great human songs.

First, there is the song of joy in the life and glory of this world. We look around us, ourselves being

young, and gay, and full of vigour and hopefulness, and all things are bright, and fair, and radiant with promise of the future.

The year's at the spring,
The day's at the morn,
The lark's on the wing,
All's right with the world.

So it seems. We are able to take pleasure in all the beautiful things about us, and we do take pleasure in them. And it is well that we should. We are as happy as kings. Why not? Let the young man rejoice in his youth. It is easy at such a time, in such a mood, to sing songs of praise to the bountiful Giver, and to say, "Worthy art Thou that didst create all things by Thy will." If we wished to find an illustration of this spirit of delight in the glory of Nature, I do not think we could do better than take the hundred-and-fourth Psalm. That psalm is like the singing of a lark. It pours out its notes of praise in a tumultuous flood. The psalmist cannot choose but sing. He will sing to the Lord as long as he lives. He will sing praises to his God while he has any being. For it is the Lord who stretches out the heavens as a curtain and rides in the clouds as a chariot, and walks on the wings of the wind, who sends forth the springs into the valleys, and satisfies the earth with the fruit of His works, who causes the grass to grow, and provides corn, and wine, and oil, who plants the cedars of Lebanon, and 'crowns them with glory, and fills the sea with His riches. It is a great Nature song, All things are good, and all things seem to be praising

the God who created them. In such songs we are able to join sometimes, or were able once.

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

We can recall such a time. How good then it was to be alive. Trouble might come some day, but it was far off. We gave no heed to it. We revelled in the sunshine, and the fragrance of flowers, and in all the abounding life, and ceaseless movement, and ever-varying interest of the visible creation.

But as it was in the vision of John, so it is in our experience as men. Presently there comes a change. We see things of which we had taken no heed before. A cloud passes over the sun. We shiver as if by the breath of some cold wind. Sounds of pain force themselves upon our attention. A sense of weariness creeps over us. We are troubled by sad forebodings. The gloom deepens. We have a feeling that night is coming on, and we tremble to think of what the darkness may conceal. Thus we are minished and brought low. We find trouble and sorrow.

Is not that a common experience? May we not say that it is an universal experience? You may meet with men on whose pathway no dark shadow ever seems to have descended, but you very seldom meet with such men. And in these apparently exceptional cases it may be doubted whether things are quite as they seem. The heart knoweth his own

bitterness. And often there is bitter trouble in the hearts of the most prosperous men of which God only is aware.

But, certainly, for the generality of men sooner or later life assumes a tragic aspect. Then comes the first shock, the first crushing disappointment. The familiar story of Buddha may be taken as a typical story. He grows up without any mournful experience. The world for him is full of interest and delight. He is not permitted to know what it really is. He lives in a palace. He has the vigour of body which makes life only a luxury, and gives him easy pre-eminence in all the exercises in which young men take pleasure.

But there comes a day when his eyes are opened, and he sees the world as it is. On his way to his garden he chances to meet an old man staggering under the burden of his years. He is astonished and distressed. "What does this mean?" he asks. "Is this something exceptional, something peculiar to this particular man?"

"No," he is told, "this is old age, nothing more, and old age comes at length to all men." That is enough. There will be no pleasure for him that day. What has he to do with pleasure, seeing he is destined to such an end.

Another day he sees a man struck down by some painful disease, and that is another blow. It is not old age then only, that one has to fear. And again he feels that pleasure must be impossible to one who is in danger of being visited by such misfortunes.

A third time, when he is walking he meets a funeral, and sees the dead man stretched on his

bier, and the sorrowing friends and relations uttering pitiful cries, and throwing dust on their heads.

So he learns what life means, and his soul is no more capable of pleasure-seeking.

Well, when we come to understand these things the first simple, spontaneous song of our youth becomes impossible, and it is another song that we sing, and in another key. The hymn of praise becomes a dirge, a cry of pain. In every literature and every age you meet with such plaintive cries. It is "the eternal note of sadness" which Sophocles heard on the Ægean long ago, in the grating roar of the pebbles on the beach when they are drawn back by the wave and flung again on the strand, that note of sadness with its tremulous cadence which brought into his mind "the turbid ebb and flow of human misery." It is the cry of Vergil whose single words, it has been remarked, and phrases and pathetic half lines give utterance to the sense of tears in mortal things, to the pain and weariness which are the experience of men in every time.

And you meet with it, I need not say, in the Bible, again and again, in psalms and prophecies, in the Book of Job with its heart-breaking cries, in the despairing philosophy of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Even in that hundred-and-fourth Psalm, to which I have referred, the shadow falls for a moment.

Thou openest Thy hand, they are filled with good.

Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled : thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.

There is the great universal fact which cannot
always be kept in the background,

There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
But has one vacant chair.

And seeing that these things are so we must sing,
if we have hearts to sing at all, that second song of
mankind, which is a song of trouble and perplexity,
a cry for light in darkness, and for deliverance from
the cruel tyranny of doubt and fear.

But this cry of hunger and despair is not the true
song of the Church of Christ. That new song sounds
quite another note. It sounds that note of victory
that John heard echoing and re-echoing throughout
the heavens. For in the Lamb, as it had been slain,
that is in the midst of the Throne of God, we have
the true and sufficient interpretation of the mysteries
of life and death. This Man of Sorrows, who has
overcome the world, who was dead, but is alive
again, and alive for evermore, He is our Hope, the
Key of David and the Bright and Morning Star.
The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after
wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, the Power
of God, and the Wisdom of God. It is not to be
maintained, of course, that the Gospel clears away
all our difficulties. It does not. We are still but
as children in the presence of inscrutable mysteries.
But it should not be said that we have no language
but a cry. We have something better than that.
"What is needed," a shrewd thinker of our own
day has written, "what is needed is such a living
faith in God's relation to man as shall leave no place
for that helpless resentment against the appointed

Order so apt to rise within us at the sight of undeserved pain. And this faith is possessed by those who vividly realize the Christian form of Theism. For they worship One who is no remote contriver of a universe to whose ills He is indifferent. If they suffer, did He not on their account suffer also? If suffering falls not always on the most guilty, was He not innocent? Shall they cry aloud that the world is ill-designed for their convenience, when He for their sakes submitted Himself to its conditions? It is true that beliefs like these do not in any narrow sense resolve our doubts, nor provide us with explanations. But they give us something better than many explanations. For they minister, or rather the Reality behind them ministers, to one of our deepest ethical needs: to a need which far from showing signs of diminution seems to grow with the growth of civilization, and to touch us ever more keenly as the hardness of an earlier time dissolves away."

To these words of Mr. Balfour's we can heartily assent. Surely it is much to be able to believe that above all the turmoil and wickedness of this world love is ruling, and such love as can stoop to the lowest humiliation, and the last extremity of pain; to believe that God has taken upon Himself the burden of man's misery and sin, and so has become man's brother, and his Saviour; to believe that joy is to be born out of all the sorrow of the world, and that gain is to come out of loss, and victory to follow apparent failure and defeat.

It would be small comfort to us poor mortals in our troubles to look up and see the happy gods

serene and tranquil on Olympian heights. But that is not what John sees. He sees love allied to Almighty Power, love on the Throne, and love victorious by its own sacrifice over sin and death. It is a sight to touch us profoundly, the sight of this Lamb of God who gives us His peace, who takes away the sin of the world, who turns darkness into light, and the shadow of death into the morning. And, beholding such a vision, how can we refrain from taking our part with angels and archangels and all the hosts of Heaven in this new song? We cannot sing for joy because this world is so fair, and our life in it is so good, and our prospects are so bright. The song of happy childhood would die on our lips. But even though trouble should have come to us and disappointment; though health should be failing and old age creeping on, we need not be indulging in sad complaints and singing melancholy dirges. Indeed, in the song which we sing there may well be a deeper note of gladness than was ever sounded in the early days before we knew what the world was like.

I looked, and behold a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and I heard a voice from Heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne.

May it be given to us to listen to that solemn music and to have some part in it.

XIII.—SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT ¹

IT has been thought well that, being gathered here together as men and women devoted to the service of Christ, we should spend a little time in taking stock, as it were, of ourselves, and considering, with all seriousness and perfect frankness, what are some of the fundamental conditions which are essential to our spiritual well-being and to the success of our work.

There is certainly much for which we have reason to be thankful. There is noteworthy activity among us in various directions. There is a good deal of philanthropic activity, and not a little intellectual activity also. There was never a time, I suppose, when our ministers and Churches were concerning themselves so deeply with social problems. We are all recognizing our responsibilities in this direction, and trying to do what we can to make this world a better and happier world for people to live in. And we are exercising our minds, too, with theological questions. We are no longer willing to accept traditional views without demur. We will take nothing for granted. We want to get at the inmost heart of the truth. We are devoting ourselves to theological research, and our ambition is to shape

¹ An address delivered at the meeting of the Congregational Union in Liverpool, October 1908.

such a philosophy of religion as shall commend itself to the intelligence of our age.

Well, let us thank God for both these forms of activity. I do not envy the man whose heart is never troubled, and whose conscience is never burdened by the thought of the sorrows and struggles of the poor. All honour to those who are wearing themselves out in the service of humanity. And all honour, too, to those who are labouring at the work of theological reconstruction. It is a great and noble work in which they are engaged, and a most necessary work, and we bid them God-speed.

But while we rejoice in all this activity, it may be we are, at times, aware of something that seems to be lacking in our religious life. Have we, we ask, quite the same kind of experience that some have had who have told us how they have felt? We have laboured and we have thought, till our minds have ached with the effort. But has there been any vision? Have we seen anything, heard anything, become ever aware that a Presence was with us, that a Voice was speaking to us, that a Hand was being laid upon us? Has there been this overpowering sense of the Invisible, the Eternal? Has there been the thrill, the awe, the rapture, the unspeakable joy, the profound, immeasurable peace, which such a vision, such an experience must surely bring with it? There are those great hymns of the Church, with their glow and their passion. We sing them, but do they give expression to anything of which we can say that we know very much? Are we walking in the Light, as the children of the Light, or

are we struggling in the gloom, with problems practical or speculative which seem to be too hard for us ?

Now, I venture to ask whether in all our eagerness, natural and laudable as it is, we may not be missing something which would come to us if we were a little more quiet, a little more receptive, a little more humble, perhaps ? We are determined to know what the truth is, and it is a most just and honourable ambition. But have we considered sufficiently the means by which the truth may be apprehended ? We will explain the mysteries of Incarnation and Atonement, and we will do it by the use of the understanding, and we are hoping that if that fine instrument can only be sharp enough, and kept at work long enough, the hard task will be accomplished. But is not this a vain hope ? In his old age Thomas Binney, whose intellectual vigour no one who knew him would dispute, said that he was willing to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. It may be that is the only way in which any of us can receive the kingdom of God, though we may be still in the pride and strength of our youth. There are things that are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes. That saying of our Lord's may be misunderstood and perverted, but there is surely a deep meaning in it which it well becomes us to lay seriously to heart. We may be relying too much on our wisdom and prudence. We may be forgetting that the secret we would discover by sheer force of intellect may be an open secret to those whose intellectual gifts are of the poorest, and a secret that will only be revealed to us in so

far as we are willing to make use of powers that have little to do with the logical understanding.

I recollect long ago lighting upon a little book by Dr. Macleod Campbell, the author of that treatise on the Atonement to which many of you are so deeply indebted. This modest little volume was called, I think, "The Bread of God." It is very many years since I saw it, and I have no clear remembrance of its line of argument, but it left an impression on my mind which has never been effaced. It taught me that Christ might be apprehended and appropriated in other ways than by the elaboration of theories, that it was not necessary to work out a philosophy of the Atonement, that would satisfy all the requirements of the intellect, that it was possible to accept Christ, and to live by Him, as a hungry man may accept a piece of bread and feed upon it without any knowledge of the laws of chemistry or physiology, for the satisfaction of his need and the nourishment of his body ; that there was such a thing as the feeding upon Christ in the heart by faith, even though the intellect might be confused and distracted by a hundred conflicting theories ; that what man wanted, and might have, through the infinite grace of God, was the very life that was Christ Himself. That was a lesson, I think, worth learning. It was the kind of lesson that Bunyan learned on that day of which he tells us when " he was passing into the field." What a story that is, the story of his illumination, and the peace that it brought to him ! He has been a brisk talker on religious subjects. He has had a fairly good opinion of himself. Then comes that ever-

to-be-remembered day when he sees the women sitting at the door in the sun, in the town of Bedford, and conversing, as though joy did make them speak of the things of God. They are in a world of which Bunyan knows nothing. They are, indeed, in the sun, while he is without in the winter cold. Then comes a sad time of conflict, of conflict mental and spiritual. There is a secret which eludes him. He is like a man in a nightmare, who fumbles at a door which he cannot open. But at length there comes an end to his trouble. In that field he looks up with the eye of his soul and sees what Stephen saw. He sees Christ at the right hand of God. And he sees nothing else, can think of nothing else. "Ah, methought, Christ, Christ, there was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes." And he was loosed from the fetters of iron that bound him. What was the meaning of it all? That he had worked out at last a satisfactory theory of justification by faith, or imputed righteousness! I think not. It was not a theory about Christ that helped him. It was not anything that Christ had done, or suffered. It was Christ Himself, His very intimate, adorable Self, who was for him, and with him, and, best of all, within him, as the Life of his life, and the fountain of his joy for evermore. "Ah, methought, Christ, Christ." Is not that the Pauline experience over again? It may be that there are some explanations and arguments of the Apostle which we find it a little hard to follow. It may be our own fault, but they leave us somewhat cold. But there is one cry of his which must often have touched us to the quick. He has been speaking of his hopeless struggle

after holiness and peace, and he recalls the moment of deepest spiritual darkness and despair, and re-echoes the cry of his soul in that black moment. O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? And then the morning breaks, and what a morning it is! The deliverer is at hand. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." There is emotion there too deep for any utterance other than this broken sentence. There are things that cannot be explained, that may scarcely be talked about. "I thank God through Jesus Christ." It is enough. We understand. It is something that must be felt. We would not be among those who would peep and botanize upon a mother's grave. The great ingenious arguments interest the mind. But here is something that goes down into the deepest places of the soul. "Ah, methought, Christ, Christ." He is everything, wisdom, sanctification, redemption, everything.

Let me give one other illustration, familiar enough, no doubt, of what I am trying to say. When I was in Boston nine years ago, some kind, unknown friend sent me Dr. Munger's *Life of Horace Bushnell*, and I read it on the deck of the steamer as I came home. There was one incident in it which struck me as being very significant. Bushnell had applied his brilliant and subtle intellect to the consideration of theological questions, and was, indeed, ever a thinker both ingenious and daring. But there came a day when the light flashed upon him as it had never done before. He had had such sorrows to bear as many of you have known. He lost a child, and such losses will sometimes bring a man strangely near the

gates of Heaven. And to the gates of Heaven he came. It was one morning early in February—how interesting are these careful notes of time and place—one morning early in February, when he told his wife of the new light that had shone into his heart. “What have you seen?” she asked. “I have seen the Gospel,” he replied. And we are told that he was another man from that hour, a new man in a new world. He had thought profoundly, and reasoned acutely, of many things. Now there was something that he had seen.

And, brethren, I want to ask you, and to ask myself, whether, amid all our speculations and controversies, there is anything that we have seen, anything which we have had faith enough, purity of heart enough, humbleness of mind enough, to see. It is so much to be desired that we should be able to see what God may be prepared to reveal to us. It is good for us to be devoting ourselves to the service of the poor. It is good for us to be the helpers of the struggling and the sorrowful. But we shall scarcely be able to help them in the highest ways unless we can say to them, “That which we have seen, which we have heard, which we have handled, of the Word of life, declare we unto you.” You know how John Mill fell into a mood of despair when he thought of the unbearable dulness of life if all the schemes on which his heart was set could be accomplished. I do not wonder. Man cannot live by bread alone. Where there is no vision the people perish.

I hope I shall not be misunderstood. I have not been disparaging the function of the intellect. Nor

have I been pleading for a sentimental religion, an emotional religion, the religion of the mystic and the dreamer. That has not been my purpose. But am I not right in saying that some of the most careful thinking of the acutest minds of our day is tending to establish the fact that it is not by the understanding alone that the truth of God is to be discovered? I do not want to be reactionary, or obscurantist. I do not believe that I am. But for myself I do desire to receive in all humility what God may reveal. These forty years I have been taxing my poor brain—not, I know, to the public advantage that has attended the labours of some of my brethren—still there has been the effort, the struggle. And so it will be, I suppose, until the wheels of the machine cease to run, and it crumbles into dust. But I am willing, I hope, to let the light stream into my soul as the sweet morning air will stream into your chamber when you fling wide the casement. I am willing to let the influences of the Spirit descend on my heart as the summer rain. The Person, and the work, and the sacrifice of Christ may be, and are, beyond my grasp. Who can fathom these mysteries?

No angel in the sky
Can fully bear that sight,
But downwards bends his burning eye
At mysteries so bright.

But if Christ will be to me as daily bread, and, thank God, He will, if I may receive His spirit, and share His life, and have fellowship of aim with Him,

if I may truly feed upon Him in my heart, then I pray that I may not be so blind as to miss the great opportunity, so perverse and foolish as to forfeit my part and inheritance and my high privilege in the kingdom of His grace.

XIV.—THE PASSAGE OF THE JORDAN

Behold the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.—JOSHUA iii. 2.

HITHERTO the Israelites had been led on their way by the pillar of cloud. But now that was to be seen no more. With the death of Moses, apparently, it had disappeared. Then were the people from this time to be without any guide? Moses was gone, and the cloudy pillar was gone, and it was a strange land into which they were to enter. They had not passed that way heretofore. Were they to be left to their own wisdom and devices as they went forward to meet new dangers and new difficulties? Some of them may have had their fears, but such was not to be their fate. God fulfils Himself in many ways, and makes use of various methods and instruments in His dealings with men; but He Himself remains, and He never forsakes those who put their trust in Him, or fails them when they need His help. When Moses falls, Joshua is ready to take his place; and Joshua is even better fitted than Moses for the work which has now to be done. For the people need rather a soldier and a man of action now that the time is come to take possession of the new

country, than a legislator, or a prophet. And, again, though the pillar of cloud has vanished, another sign is given to them to indicate the way that they should go. "It came to pass," you read in the second verse of this chapter, "after three days that the officers went through the host, and they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it." And you see that they are told, in the next verse, that they are not to go too near to it, nor to crowd around it, but to keep at a distance of about two thousand cubits—half a mile or more—"that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore." So the ark is to take the place of the pillar of cloud.

It is better that there should come sometimes these changes of form—changes in the method of the Divine communication with men, or their communication with Him, though we are apt to quarrel with them, and to be greatly afraid when they seem to be impending. For our disposition is so strong to regard the means as the end, and to exalt the human or the material at the expense of the spiritual, of which it is the symbol, that we need, in order to be kept from idolatry, to have these visible things, these material props, taken from us, so that we may be led to trust more fully in the unseen, and to lean only on the eternal arm of God. It is hard to part with that with which we have long been familiar, and upon which we have been accustomed to depend—the particular ritual or form of worship—the house

of prayer which has become a kind of embodiment of tender religious sentiments—the formulas by which the truth of God, which cannot be compressed in its fulness into any formulas, has always been presented to our minds—or, it may be, the human preacher and guide whom we have been content and glad to follow. It is often a very painful trial to part with that which has been to us in our religious life what Moses was, or what the cloudy pillar was, to the children of Israel. But if such a trial should befall us let us not be too greatly discouraged. It may be expedient for us that these things should be taken away, as it was expedient for the disciples that He should leave them who had been their chief stay and comfort and the symbol of all that was most holy and most wise, though they could not imagine at the time how it was possible that they should gain by His departure. God may be preparing to give us some better thing—something at least that will be better for us—better adapted to our spiritual condition and needs, in place of that which He is taking away. Or, He may be meaning to develop in us the spirit of dependence on Himself, which will make us less dependent on any earthly help, and will, therefore, make us more strong and free. Anything is a gain which serves this end, which leads us to lean more closely on the invisible arm and press nearer to the heart of our Father in Heaven.

In the case of the Israelites it was a higher symbol that was now to take the place of the pillar. The pillar had answered its purpose. It had served to show the people the way they should go, and to

remind them of the Divine guardianship ; but in itself it had no special suggestiveness. But with the ark it was otherwise. It had a sacredness in public esteem, inasmuch as it contained the tables of the testimony. It was the repository of the law. The word of the Lord was enshrined in it. And it was not of the Divine law only that it spoke. It spoke of mercy also, of clemency, of God's forgiveness ; for the lid of it was the mercy seat. So that while it was a symbol of law, it was a symbol also of hope and of peace to those who might be mourning their inadequate fulfilment of the law. It was, then, an object to be regarded with reverence, and was in danger, indeed, of being regarded, as afterwards it was in fact, with superstitious reverence.

Now, then, the ark is to be followed. Let us try to realize the scene. It is one of great dramatic interest, as well as of moral significance. The people have been wandering long in the deserts. Now the time of their wandering is over. Their new home lies before them. They have heard much of its glories ; now they are about to enter into the possession of it. But between them and their inheritance there rolls the Jordan, at this time, in the spring, swollen with the rains of winter and the melted snow from Lebanon, so that its channel is full to the brim and overflowing. Here is an obstacle that has to be met and overcome before the Promised Land is entered. How shall they cross the wide and turbulent stream ? God will help them in their difficulty, as He has helped them before.

“ Sanctify yourselves,” says Joshua, “ for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”

“*Sanctify yourselves.*” There was a preparation appropriate and necessary on their part in view of the great event of the morrow—a day which was to be memorable in their history, not only as the day when they crossed over into the land which they were to inherit, but as a day when Jehovah had interposed for their help. And let me say here that there is no important step in our lives, nor critical period, which we may not wisely anticipate with such preparation of the heart. If you are entering on any new stage in the journey of life, if some great difficulty is at hand, some unusual danger, some special form of temptation, so that you will need all the strength, all the wisdom, all the patience, all the grace which may be at your disposal, then sanctify yourself. In former ages, when a man was about to consecrate himself to the service of the distressed and to a life of stainless honour and purity as a Christian knight, he was required, having first confessed, to spend the midnight hours alone in church, that he might be prepared by that solemn vigil for the work and strife which lay before him. And there are times when we should surely be the stronger and the more resolute, and should save ourselves, it might be, from many a lamentable fall, if without conforming to the letter of that ancient custom, we acted in the spirit of it. “Watch and pray,” said our Lord to His disciples, when the great crisis was at hand. “Watch and pray.” Watching and praying are never out of season; but there are times (and we generally know when they come) when it is, in a very special sense, necessary that we should examine

our position, that we should see if herein we are weak and in danger of falling, that we should take heed and confess our sin, and seek the Divine pardon and the Divine help ; that we should sanctify ourselves that so we may not fail, as so many have failed who have gone into the battle without any such preparation.

So the children of Israel prepared for the events of the coming day ; and now when the day is come and the hour, the priests are bidden to take the ark and bear it down to the brink of the river. *The ark is to go first.* “ Behold,” says Joshua to the people, “ the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.” And the priests are obedient. They draw near to the river, with the host of Israel following them at a distance, so that all can see what will take place. Nearer and nearer they come to the rushing stream, and still there is no pause. It is a fine thing to see men advancing steadily and quietly, in the exercise of simple faith in God, to meet insuperable obstacles. You may smile at them, but you cannot help admiring them. You may call them fanatics, but you cannot consent to call them fools. And how often the sequel shows that they are not fools. How often it has happened that insuperable obstacles have been proved to be no serious obstacles at all ; and impossibilities, so called, have become accomplished facts, as the results of the obstinate endeavours of those who have thought less of what was feasible or expedient than of what seemed to them to be their imperative duty in the sight of God. It happened so in this striking story of the passage of

the Jordan. The priests march on, but no prospect of a safe passage appears. They come to the very brink of the stream, and still it rushes by, defying them, as the waves defied the mandate of the Danish king. Their feet become actually wet as they step into the flood, and *then* the way is made plain before them in a moment. *Not till then.* God's help comes when it is needed, not before. You want to have to-day what you will need to-morrow. You want to have difficulties removed now which will not become difficulties till some future time. We are so impatient and so anxious. But as our trust is in Christ, we should surely be able to come to a wiser mind. "Let the morrow," He says, "take thought for the things of itself." And those who have followed His counsel with an understanding heart have learned by experience what wise counsel it is. Go on bravely, and do the duty of the hour—and when the emergency comes, if ever it does come, then will come also the means of escape. It is a great embarrassment which is before you, and you think you will be overwhelmed; but by God's goodness it may be that you will scarcely do more than wet your feet. It was so with these priests. "It came to pass as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off." So a passage was made, and the priests carried the ark down into the midst

of Jordan, and there remained till all the host of Israel had passed over.

But now, in our day, the ark has gone the way of the cloudy pillar. It, too, has disappeared. Are we then forsaken? Have we nothing to guide us in the strange and perilous way we have to go? It is only the voice of unbelief that can answer "No." God speaks to us, not as He spoke to our fathers, or to His people in ancient days, but not less truly than He spoke to them, and by a mightier though a gentler voice, and by a symbol infinitely more rich in meaning. To us in these later days He has spoken by His Son. And what is the Son? He is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. It is He who is our Guide to lead us forward in the untrodden ways. Surely the pillar and the ark, yes, and the priest also, and all the forms and ritual of the old covenant, might well vanish away, if in their place the Christ, the Son of the living God, is to come. The ark was sacred to the people because it contained the tables of the testimony, and because it was the symbol of the forgiving mercy of God. But what is Christ? In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He carried with Him the holy and perfect law; and not as the ark contained the law that was given by Moses; but because He embodied it, because He fulfilled it in His own person and life. He is the Word that is made manifest. In Him, and not by rules and ordinances merely, but by all that He says, by all that He is, God's mind and heart reveal themselves to the world. He is the image of the Invisible God—

a nobler symbol surely than any ever known to the old dispensation—a symbol, indeed, that was more than a symbol—a symbol that not only suggested but actually revealed. And not only a higher and fuller revelation of the Divine *law*, but a surer symbol and evidence of the Divine *mercy* also. “Thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark,” had been the direction given to Moses ; “ and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee : and there I will meet with thee, and will commune with thee.” It was a great and precious promise. But if that which was done away was glorious, how much more does that which remains exceed in glory ? For in Christ the Father draws near not to those alone who belong to a special order, and at appointed times, but at all times and to all men, and comes near to them that He may forgive them, that He may sanctify them, that He may reconcile them to Himself, that He may enrich them beyond measure with the benediction of His heavenly grace. A better Guide this is than any that had appeared before ; and one whom we can love as a brother, one whom we can trust as a friend—no inanimate symbol that moves on in silence before us, and that we may not approach, that we dare not touch, but a man like ourselves, with warm human sympathies, touched with a feeling of our infirmities, knowing us, if we are willing to follow Him and to be His sheep, by name, and caring for us when we are tempted, and restoring us when we stumble and fall. To Him we are to look, and after Him we are to go, if we would travel in the ways of wisdom and peace, and attain to everlasting life.

And notice this—that like the ark which was a type of Himself, He passes over before us into Jordan, that we who follow Him may pass through it in safety. Into Jordan—for between us, too, and the land of our hope and our desire, there rolls a deep, and, as it seems to our fears at times perhaps, an impassable stream. Men of all times have had their hopes of a better world, into which they might enter at last. And we have had our hopes. Those especially who have had weariness and disappointments to bear, like the Israelites in their wanderings in the desert, have clung to the thought of a region of peace and joy which may be their inheritance when the strife is over. But who has not had thoughts of such a future? of such a destiny? of such a home? We have much here that is sweet—many of us—much from which it would cost us not a little to part. But we have not all that we need; and in how many ways are we thwarted! Why the very fruition of our desire serves only to make it the more keen! Surely there are better things in store—a clearer vision, a larger life, a more perfect holiness. But between that bright world which our imagination paints and us there lies the dark and deep river. Not the stream of death merely. It is not death that threatens to hinder the fulfilment of our hopes. The sting of death is sin. It is sin that has made the stream so alarming. We have done wrong. And how can we meet with God, and how can we enter into that holy presence? How should we not be overwhelmed and lost in the passage that we must take when we depart out of this world? Well—let us look at this picture. Here

is the ark of the Lord, in the centre of Jordan ; and while it rests there, the people by hundreds and thousands are able to pass over to the other shore in safety. Does not that remind us of another scene ? “ They took Jesus,” you read in one of the Gospel accounts, “ and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went forth unto a place called the place of a skull ; and they crucified Him, and two other with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.” “ *In the midst* ”—the centre of all that terrible scene. What a scene it is ! Death is there, and death the most shameful and agonizing. And sin is there—sin the most aggravated and the most awful. Death had never worn so hateful an aspect as when it laid its finger upon Him, the Lord of life. Sin had never been so exceeding sinful and utterly shameful as when it crucified and slew the Holy One of God. But Christ has passed over before us into this deep gulf of iniquity and horror. “ He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.” “ He tasted death for every man.” But, thanks be to God, the deep waters did not overwhelm Him. He entered into the midst of them, and they rolled back and acknowledged Him their Master. It was impossible for death to hold Him. He met it, and triumphed openly over it. And there He stands in the centre of that Jordan that we dread, that we, trusting in Him and sharing in His victory and His joy and His eternal life, may pass over in safety and peace. “ He leads us through no darker room than He went through before.” Better than that ! He waits for us Himself in that darkest room, as we think, which will also be the last, that He may

make it light for us by the comfort of His presence. You remember it is said that poor *Christian* was greatly troubled and cast down as he passed through the river, and could not be comforted because of the sins he had committed in his pilgrimage, and before he had begun to be a pilgrim ; but at length *Hopeful* said to him, " Be of good cheer ! Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." And with that *Christian* broke out in a loud voice, " *I see Him !* and He tells me, ' When thou passest through the waters I am with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee.' " There will be times of darkness, no doubt, and of anxiety and trouble ; and Christ's servant may not be always able to see His face. But there He is, nevertheless, in death as in life, abiding with those who humbly seek to do His will. Let it be ours to abide with Him in life, and then in the hour of extremity we may be sure that He is at hand ; and resting in His love we shall depart in peace to the land of everlasting light.



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